The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India

Exploring transgressions, contests and diversities

Edited by
Biswamoy Pati

Routledge Studies in South Asian History

The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India

The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India was much more than a 'sepoy mutiny'. It was a major event in South Asian and British colonial history that significantly challenged imperialism in India.

This fascinating collection explores hitherto ignored diversities of the Great Rebellion such as gender and colonial fiction, courtesans, white 'marginals', penal laws and colonial anxieties about the Mughals, even in exile. Also studied are popular struggles involving tribals and outcastes, and the way outcastes in the south of India locate the Rebellion. Interdisciplinary in focus and based on a range of untapped source materials and rare, printed tracts, this book questions conventional wisdom.

The comprehensive introduction traces the different historiographical approaches to the Great Rebellion, including the imperialist, nationalist, marxist and subaltern scholarship. While questioning typical assumptions associated with the Great Rebellion, it argues that the Rebellion neither began nor ended in 1857–58.

Clearly informed by the 'Subaltern Studies' scholarship, this book is post-subalternist as it moves far beyond narrow subalternist concerns. It will be of interest to students of Colonial and South Asian History, Social History, Cultural and Political Studies.

Biswamoy Pati is Associate Professor in the Department of History, Delhi University. His latest publications include two co-edited books published by Routledge, *The Social History of Health and Medicine in Colonial India* (with Mark Harrison, 2009) and *India's Princely States: People, Princes and Colonialism* (with Waltraud Ernst, 2007) and an edited volume entitled *The 1857 Rebellion: Debates in Indian History and Society* (2007).

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In memory of Professor Basudeb Chattopadhayay

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This book is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Basudeb Chattopadhayay of the Department of History, Calcutta University, whose sudden demise left us shocked. Basudeb-da was full of enthusiasm over this project and had agreed to contribute a chapter. Sadly, he could not see this book nor write the promised chapter.

1 Introduction

The Great Rebellion of 1857

Biswamoy Pati

The Great Rebellion of 1857 or what was supposed to be a 'sepoy mutiny' has undoubtedly been a major landmark in colonial South Asian history.[1] Besides posing what was undoubtedly the most serious military challenge to the might of British colonialism over the nineteenth century, its vibrations and memories lasted much longer than had been expected by those carrying out the colonial counter-insurgency operations.[2] The early accounts and testimonies, including contemporary accounts, saw the Great Rebellion from a typically colonial perspective.[3] The most common among these was to locate it as a 'sepoy mutiny'. This projection was aimed at erasing the problems posed by colonial expansion and exploitation[4] and provide comfort to the colonial bureaucracy and those at 'home'. In fact, colonial sources depict the Great Rebellion as a 'sepoy mutiny' that developed into a 'rebellion' – a theme that has, as we shall see, haunted the imagination of generations of historians, including nationalist historians and the 'subalterns'.

This interpretation related to the 'sepoy mutiny' drew upon the 'anxiety' of the sepoys that was related to the use of Enfield rifles. Thus, the introduction of the new Enfield rifle in 1857 meant that the bullets were coated with grease made from the fat of cows (sacred to Hindus) and of pigs (abhorred by the Muslim). As the cartridges had to be bitten before being used, the Hindu and Muslim sepoys interpreted it as part of a plot to convert them to Christianity, by defiling their caste and their religion.

As was to be expected, these features formed the basis of the construct that saw 1857 as a religious conflict. Thus, initially, it was seen as a plot of the Dharma Sabha of Calcutta, which aimed to preserve Hinduism from the onslaughts of the English. What is striking is the way this idea of a 'religious plot' soon shifted and came to be identified as a 'Muslim conspiracy' – a point that seems to have a remarkable continuity even today. Thus, one can see its imprints even on present-day scholars. And, if considered holistically, one can easily see how these components were incorporated into imperialist historiography and served to reinforce the dominant idea of a 'clash of cultures' or a 'clash of civilisations'. This was an idea that, occasioned by such 'encounters', developed over the nineteenth century. The power of imperialist historiography needs to be stressed when it comes to making this idea

'acceptable' even today. After all, the phraseology of the 'clash of civilisations' is being written and rewritten in the twenty-first century as well. Consequently, what needs to be reiterated is that the Great Rebellion of 1857 forms a major milestone in the germination of this idea.

Again significant was the effort by colonial historiography to map the region affected by the Great Rebellion as being confined only to parts of northern India. Thus, other regions were 'silenced' in an effort to virtually 'contain' the Rebellion. This was intended to make the colonialists draw solace from the fact that it was not a widespread rebellion.[5]

At the same time, there were sections of 'free-traders' who were against the monopoly of the English East India Company, and who connected 1857 with the problems faced by the Indian rulers, chieftains, etc., who were unhappy under Company rule. After all, the 'free-traders' were against the Company's monopoly in India and wanted a secure future that would improve their prospects of retaining what was emerging as the 'crown jewel' of the British empire.

Nevertheless, some common threads link the various theories associated with the imperialist position. Here, mention can be made of the *goondas* and *badmashes* (ruffians) who seemed, in the colonial imagination, to be active participants and a very 'vital' part of the Great Rebellion. This co-existed with the idea of preaching by subversive elements, who ranged from caste ideologues and social reformists to the Wahabis and the Farazis.[6] One also sees references to the personal ambitions of the declining aristocracy with the coming of the Company. There is also the stereotypical trope of the barbarity of the rebels. Indeed, a logical link connected their barbarity to the treatment supposedly meted out to white women during the Great Rebellion. In this discourse, the white woman almost emerged as a symbol of the English 'nation'.[7]

Some of these themes sound familiar even from today's standpoint and one can see certain continuities. For example, the power of the religious 'heads' is a premise that remains virtually unaltered. However, the historian needs to ponder about and provide evidence to delineate the connections between the rebellious 'leaders' and their following. Did the 'Muslim' – a rather nebulous label – always follow the preacher? Similarly, the theme of the 'barbaric' assault of the rebels, which was invoked time and again, needs to be located as a strategy for justifying the brutal imperialist counter-insurgency operations that followed. Interestingly, the fall-out of colonialism and how it established itself through its new-found alliances, or the miseries of the common people that they unleashed in unison, remained too remote to imperialist historiography.

Early Indian writings on the Rebellion

Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–98) was the first Indian who wrote a tract (*Asbab-e-Baghawat-e-Hind*, 1858)[8] in which he sought to examine the underlying features that determined the nature of the 1857 Rebellion. Later on, in 1860, Khan wrote another tract (originally in Urdu) which focused on the 'loyal Muslims'.[9] Interestingly, there seems to have been a selective 'loss of

memory' with regard to the first tract that he wrote, where he critiqued British policy and linked it to the Great Rebellion of 1857. Instead, the second tract, in which Khan sought to allay colonial insecurities that had been posed by the 'conspiratorial/rebel Muslims', seems to have been virtually encrypted in memory, charging it with communal politics. These aspects assume significance especially if one takes into account that Khan's was perhaps the first Indian viewpoint to be presented that critiqued imperialism and its policies as constituting causes of the Rebellion, and most importantly, locating 1857 as a 'Rebellion' (viz. *Baghawat*).

Nationalist historiography

It is perhaps against this background that one ought to see the development of subsequent writings on the Great Rebellion of 1857.[10] The access to sources after the independence of India saw interesting developments related to the debates on the nature of 1857. Serious efforts were made to document the history of the freedom movement in different states of India. This co-existed with the development of a rather sophisticated nationalist historiography that focused on the complexities of the Great Rebellion. This historiography was not fully comfortable with the idea of it being called the 'First War of Indian Independence' and, in fact, attempted to break from it. The field was actually developed by the nationalist historians who worked hard to show the 'nation' and its leaders struggling against the British. K.K. Datta and S.B. Chaudhuri saw the Rebellion of 1857 as an event that had two distinct strands. Thus, it began as a 'mutiny', but subsequently shifted and assumed the nature of a 'civil rebellion'. Surendranath Sen examined the organisational aspects and was dismissive about the influence of religion on the rebels. R.C. Majumdar highlighted its widespread nature in northern India, while refusing to accept it as the 'First War of Independence'.[11] Nevertheless, some problems remained. Thus, the 'spirit' of the Indian national movement left its deep imprints on these historians. This meant that some of them referred to ideas such as nationalism that was supposedly witnessed during the Great Rebellion. Thus, Sen felt that the Rebellion assumed a 'national dimension' at least in Awadh, where the patriots fought for their 'king and country',[12] and Chaudhuri saw the possibilities of the very inception of the national movement contained in the 1857 Great Rebellion.[13]

The methodological problem of the nationalist historians is that it does not view historical processes holistically, and ends by splitting the anti-imperialist resistance to British colonialism. One needs to mention here the obvious point that this position would be difficult to sustain if the background to 1857 is kept in mind. Besides, it needs to be stressed that the sepoy was, after all, a 'peasant in uniform', who articulated the problems and anxieties of the countryside. In this sense, he provided the crucial link between the countryside and the barracks. Moreover, as discussed, the idea of seeing 'nationalism' in this phase did not find consensus even among nationalist historians.

Nevertheless, with all its problems, this engagement by the nationalist historians also brought in the common people and most certainly went beyond the simple binarised categorisations that had either lauded the British as victors who had 'won' the war or the 'heroic rebellious Indians' who had been 'defeated'. This meant a shift in focus, with efforts being made to locate the internal contradictions – such as the *banians* (traders) and the moneylenders – and to recognise the popular basis of 1857, without concentrating merely on the influential classes that had been the focus of contemporary British officials. Consequently, the nationalist historians accorded a space – however limited – to the popular basis of the Great Rebellion.

It was in this sense that one witnesses what can be called a paradigm shift. Consequently, nationalist historiography did transgress the boundaries imposed on it by the early nationalists such as V.D. Savarkar and most certainly opened up new possibilities. It is here that nationalist historiography drew upon and developed the legacy of the marxists – a point regarding which historians of 'modern' India sometimes suffer from amnesia. This marxist legacy included writers/commentators ranging from Marx and Engels (who had very clearly linked the colonial exploitation of India with the anger that was displayed by the people during 1857) to R.P. Dutt (who saw 1857 as a major peasant revolt, even though it had been led by the decaying feudal forces, fighting to turn back the tide of foreign domination and get back their privileges).[14] One needs to mention here that this development, in so far as nationalist historiography is concerned, was distinctly related to the greater availability of sources following the independence of India – especially the regional language sources, including Persian and Urdu– and the effort to tap the oral traditions of the peasantry. Consequently, this contributed significantly to making it possible for subsequent historians to shift their attention to the common people.

Nevertheless, the exclusive focus on the nationalist dimension of 1857 did remain as a major aspect. Although one can understand the way in which the nationalist historians reinforced this component, it is indeed amazing that they did not seem to have situated the Great Rebellion beyond its immediate setting and goal. After all, if seen holistically, the Great Rebellion of 1857 neither began in 1857 nor ended in 1858. Consequently, if one is to grapple with the diverse dimensions of the 1857 Rebellion, one needs to look at the period from the 1830s to the 1870s in order to get a holistic picture. This was the phase of imperialist expansion and also challenges posed to the British by a host of peasant and tribal movements,[15] along with the erstwhile feudal classes who faced dispossession and also fought the British. This trend continued and reached its peak during the 1857Rebellion and ended with the 'Crown' taking over India in 1858 from the English East India Company.[16] Such an effort would problematise issues and interrogate many commonly held assertions associated with the Great Rebellion, including the point that colonialism was its virtual 'creator'; the overemphasis given to the 'economic' factors associated with it; or a point that has almost been frozen as common sense, viz. that the impact of the Great Rebellion was not felt outside the Indo-Gangetic

plain. In fact, these positions cannot be singularly attributed only to articulations of imperialist historiography because some of them are shared by nationalist historiography's negotiations with the Great Rebellion of 1857 as well.

Alternative trends

Among the early departures from this perspective, mention must be made at this point of the collection of P.C. Joshi.[17] In this work, the focus shifted to diversities ranging from the connection between the process of colonisation and the Great Rebellion, the links of the Great Rebellion with the Wahabi and Farazi movements that were profoundly anti-imperialist, and the way the Great Rebellion entered the world of Urdu and Hindustani literature and was retained in folk memory. What is sometimes forgotten and needs reiteration is that some of the scholars who contributed to this collection tapped diverse language sources and incorporated folk songs associated with the Great Rebellion.[18]

Several efforts have been made to negotiate both imperialist and nationalist historians and contest their positions on the nature of the Great Rebellion. A major charge made by the imperialist historians was that 1857 was a 'Muslim conspiracy'. Historians such as K.M. Ashraf drew our attention to the anti-imperialist anger that formed the basis of the Farazi and Wahabi movements. Ashraf highlighted the involvement of the Wahabis in the Great Rebellion in north India. In fact, given the pre-history of the Wahabi movement, its association with 1857 can hardly be seen as a conspiracy.[19] However, in a recent (unpublished) work, Iqtidar Alam Khan has shown that many of the people grouped together by K.M. Ashraf as Wahabis also included Sufis. Secondly, he has demonstrated the complexities involved in the interactions between the Wahabis and the British over the first half of the nineteenth century, which oscillated between collaboration and confrontation and were not based on opposition alone.[20] More importantly still, through his rigorous research on the Gwalior contingent, Khan also tells us a story that goes beyond conspiracies and shows the organisational ability of the rebels.[21] What in fact emerges is a popular basis for the Great Rebellion and the serious efforts by the common people to organise it in some areas.

Although, as mentioned earlier, language sources did become available after Indian independence, these sources were not used adequately. In fact, there was a gradual decline of Urdu and Persian in free India over the years, with historians neglecting these sources.[22] There was hardly any effort to translate these sources, and the Indian state did precious little to help this process in any way. One can cite here the example of S.A. Khan's work, which was neglected and has only recently been translated and published by the Oxford University Press, Pakistan.[23] In fact, efforts to work on contemporary Urdu newspapers provide fascinating insights into the 1857 Rebellion.[24]

The really good work on the Great Rebellion can be traced to the research of four scholars – Eric Stokes, Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Tapti Roy and, more

recently, Rajat Ray. While Eric Stokes accepted that the 'low Muslim rabble' was a strong revolutionary force in the cities and towns such as Aligarh, he emphasised the elitist nature of the rural revolt in 1857 in the upper and central Doab region.[25] He substantiated his argument by focusing on the peasant masses whose role was minimal and, when involved, 'tamely' followed their 'caste superiors'. Stokes attributed the Great Rebellion to caste mobilisation. Besides, he stressed the importance of the economic and social dislocations brought in by the British. Thus, the emergence/non-emergence of an 'enterprising' rural magnate proved to be crucial in determining the nature of political allegiance during the Great Rebellion. In areas where they developed, such as the Mathura and Aligarh districts, they held down the peasant revolt. Contrarily, in areas where they had failed to develop owing to the absence of major economic and social changes, the old aristocracy held power and led the people into the Great Rebellion.

Stokes sought to develop his arguments in his next work, which he did not live to complete.[26] A few of his positions – viz. that the 1857 Rebellion was not one single movement or his emphasis on its diversities and variations – remained unaltered. Nevertheless, some of his positions did change. Thus, he did away with his earlier idea that had provided centrality to caste, although his analysis did accept caste as a descriptive category. This resulted primarily from his detailed work on the Delhi region, which he completed after his visit to India in 1975–76. This meant that he directed his attention towards the diverse impact generated by colonialism even when it involved a single caste such as Jats, Gujjars and Rajputs. Consequently, this work went beyond caste and took into account inter- and intra-regional variations while examining the nature of the 1857 Rebellion.

Interestingly, Stokes went beyond strictly economic explanations and wove in factors such as ecology, culture and mentalities. This implied that, in this work, Stokes shifted his focus to the common people and moved towards forms of popular protest during the Great Rebellion 1857. In fact, Stokes now located 1857 as a peasant revolt, as the very title of his book suggests. As shown, large sections of rural society were involved in the Great Rebellion, although strict categorisations of peasants – such as 'rich', 'middle' and 'poor' – were not applicable. Nevertheless, this did not lead Stokes to look at the popular dynamism of the Great Rebellion in regions such as Awadh (Oudh), which could have provided deeper insights into this dimension.

It was Rudrangshu Mukherjee who pioneered the attempt to uncover the dimension of popular peasant protest.[27] Mukherjee examined the linkages between the *talukdars* (land holders) and the peasants. While doing this, he focused on the leadership of the *talukdars* in the Awadh region and emphasised that the real strength of the *talukdars*' resistance and the Great Rebellion of 1857 was based on the general support of the peasantry and the people in the countryside. He explained this by referring to the agrarian relations in the region, which were marked by an inter-dependence of the *talukdars* and the peasants.

Rudrangshu Mukherjee also referred to the wide-scale peasant base of the Great Rebellion in the region. He quoted a source which mentioned that 'three fourths of the adult male population of Oudh, had been in rebellion'.[28] On the basis of these sources, he contested the dominant picture provided by the 'mutiny' literature about the 'magnate leadership'. As he put it, the peasants did not play a mere rearguard, subaltern role. In fact, the peasants were on the side of the Great Rebellion in areas where the *talukdars* remained loyal to the British. This perhaps illustrates that the Great Rebellion was not always elitist in character and that it had a popular mass base in Awadh.

Mukherjee stressed the participation and initiatives of the peasantry in the Great Rebellion, which had a clear sepoy component. As explained, the sepoys were peasants in uniform.[29] However, he clarified that this link did not impose a subordinate position for the peasants, who actually played a decisive role on many occasions. In fact, whereas the *talukdars* could and did manage to get pardoned, the mass of the sepoys and the peasants faced the certain risk of being massacred if they surrendered. He explained that these features determined the nature of the 1857 Rebellion in Awadh, where the opposition to the alien order of the British was universal and assumed the form of a people's resistance.

Tapti Roy explored the popular world of the countryside in the Bundelkhand region and its relationship with the Great Rebellion 1857.[30] Thus, the Rebellion began by targeting government officials, bankers and *mahajans* (moneylenders), the burning of official papers and the 'plundering' of neighbouring towns. She emphasised that these symbolised selective targeting and driving out all visible forms of British power with which the peasants had interacted. As argued, these reflected the negative forms of political assertion that marked the most obvious and widespread form of rural '*jacqueries*'.[31] She attributed this to the knowledge about and the vulnerability of the adversary in a rather volatile context that reinforced the belief about the end of British rule and authority. This perhaps accounted for the involvement of large numbers of people, sometimes as many as 3,000–4,000 men of different areas (e.g. Johurpur, Bainda, Simree and Wasilpur – who had assembled at Tindwaree on 11 June 1857).

Roy saw a shift after the initial phase. Thus, after this, the anger of the common people was directed against those associated with colonial power and those involved with what we can perhaps identify as the internal order of exploitation. This included auction-purchasers, decree-holders, merchants and bankers. These were the people who had been responsible for the disruption and the disorder that had set in with the advent of colonialism, which affected the mass of the people.[32] As mentioned, after taking over the urban centres, the sepoys began 'attacks' on affluent people. After they left, the people from the countryside continued to be involved with this trend, on occasions along with *zamindars*. Roy highlighted this as a symbolic way of displaying power by challenging the contested order. As pointed out, this was necessary to defend their alternative political order, for which they had chosen 'their king'.

Roy emphasised the need to locate rumours as an indication of the strong involvement of the common people. Moreover, she focused on the need to go beyond official positions, which sometimes presented a monodimensional picture when it came to the participation of the peasants.

While mentioning the intensity of the counter-insurgency operations, Roy wove in the large-scale desertions of people from their villages in an attempt to explain the intensity of popular participation. Besides, she highlighted the way the *zamindars* and peasants set up their independent zones and made some rebel leaders, including some from outside their areas, head them. She emphasised the unity between the peasants and the landed sections against the British who were a common enemy, along with some sections associated with colonialism. In fact, she suggested that analysing the 'enquiries' that were conducted to punish the 'offenders' could establish, among other things, the level of mass participation.[33] She illustrated this aspect by highlighting the participation of the low castes and marginal people.[34]

The dimension of popular protest was also taken up by scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Gautam Bhadra and K.S. Singh who turned to the world of the tribals. Guha invoked the logic of 'territoriality' associated with 1857, which saw peasants remaining confined to their local boundaries during the Great Rebellion.[35] In fact, Tapti Roy's work contradicted this assertion. As mentioned earlier, she showed how the peasants not only moved to urban centres but also welcomed rebels from outside their immediate areas as their leaders. Rather surprisingly, the assertions of Ranajit Guha and the 'subaltern' historians were neither interrogated nor challenged especially by Tapti Roy, as Rudrangshu Mukherjee's book was published very soon after Guha's. Indeed, this was a context that saw the virtual 'hegemonic' domination by the 'subaltern' historians.

We also have Gautam Bhadra, a 'subaltern' historian, examining the way the Great Rebellion developed in the Chotanagpur region.[36] This tract had a pre-history of popular protest and, as emphasised, the sepoy element was marginal during 1857. The Great Rebellion began with the sepoys of the Ramgarh battalion. The Kols opposed the sepoys as the latter wanted to appropriate the plundered treasury, whereas the Kols looked at these resources as their own. The context saw traditional rivalries between the chiefs of Kharswan and Porahat surfacing, with the latter playing a confused role and vacillating between the British and the rebels. There emerged strong pressures from below, with the circulation of the arrow that called for the rebellion. As delineated, this saw the emergence of Gonoo, a Kol, as a tribal leader. As Bhadra put it, this transformed 'the mutiny of the Ramgarh battalion into a popular rebellion of the Kols'[37] – a position that harmonises perfectly with nationalist historiography.

Bhadra referred to Gonoo who described himself as a 'mere follower of the Rajah (of Singhbhum)' and 'not a leader'. As argued by Bhadra, Gonoo was not 'trying to evade responsibility for his actions, but expressing in his own words the authentic limitations of his political consciousness as a typical Kol

rebel of his time'.[38] A rather elitist position, this takes Gonoo's 'tribal naivety' for granted. Thus, Bhadra does not consider it a possibility that Gonoo could perhaps have been cleverly drawing upon the colonial construction of the 'naive adivasi' in order to escape punishment.

K.S. Singh focused on the complexities of tribal protest going beyond the sepoy component and examined the forms of tribal protest in the Chotanagpur region, central and western India.[39] He demonstrated the diversities of the tribal movements, emphasising their specificities. These included efforts not only by sections of the feudal aristocracy, but also by tribals and non-tribals. Besides efforts to restore lost power and rights, these saw the unity of tribals with non-tribals. Moreover, the tribals fought against internal exploitation, which included moneylenders and traders, whose entry into their world was intimately connected with the advent of colonialism. K.S. Singh emphasised the diverse forms of tribal protests, which included depredations.

Badri Narayan unravelled the way local traditions, folklores and popular culture situated and retained the Great Rebellion of 1857.[40] On the basis of oral evidence, he explored diversities ranging from the perception of the *firangi* (foreigner) and the folk heroes of the Rebellion to the question of popular memory. Besides throwing light on the fascinating possibilities of oral history, he delineated the way the 1857 Rebellion captured popular imagination and incorporated popular protest. Subsequently, Narayan has introduced Dalits (outcastes) into the Great Rebellion by attempting to focus on the way they remember it in north India.[41]

Finally, Rajat Ray's exploration of popular mentalities of the 1857 Rebellion offered fascinating clues to grasp both its spirit and its collective cosmology.[42] Ray emphasised the sepoys providing the crucial link between town and country, from where they were recruited. In areas such as Bengal and the Punjab, they failed to ignite the country, and the Great Rebellion did not go beyond the cantonments. Race was an integral component of the 1857 Rebellion. As pointed out, the Great Rebellion led to sudden reversals in power relations, with the dominated race rising against the white, English regime. This was perceived in terms of Hindus and Muslims jointly asserting their respective religious creeds and not in terms of a nation asserting its independence from colonial rule. This was based on patriotism and rooted in a spontaneous desire for independence from alien rule. Ray connected this with the people selecting and setting up their kings in some of the storm centres of the Great Rebellion. This assumed significance in a context wherein the restored chiefs had to accept the position of the sepoy councils which epitomised the people's power.

Ray described the alternative order that emerged as one that was curiously republican–democratic and co-existed with a hierarchical, princely structure. After all, the restored feudal chieftainships of 1857 were not like the old regimes of the eighteenth century, because 1857 had a mass movement behind it. In terms of collective mentality, 1857 marked a 'race war' against the white oppressors, who formed the master race. Nevertheless, ideologically, this was

projected as a struggle between the true religions (viz. Hinduism and Islam) and the false one (viz. Christianity). This did not result from efforts to impose the 'false' doctrine of Christianity. Instead, it was related to the question of the identity of the 'Hindus and Muslims of Hindustan', which was threatened by the moral and material aggrandisement of the arrogant imperial power. These features provided the dynamism that provided a new meaning to the reinstated chiefs of the eighteenth century.

Ray explained the dialectic of 1857, especially its nature in terms of popular mentalities, underlining its peculiarity. Thus, it was a war of races, without being a 'race war', because the subject race conceived it as a war of religion. It was a religious war that cannot be labelled in this way, as the Great Rebellion was not directed at the religion of the master race, but its political domination. It was a patriotic war of Hindu–Muslim brotherhood, which he called the 'inchoate social nationality' of Hindustan, but was not a national war. Conceptually, it was rooted in the past, but groped for an alternative to the technologically advanced British rule. In this sense, it was not traditional, but neither was it modern. The rebels of the Great Rebellion of 1857 saw it as a 'war' of 'the Hindoostanis' to protect their '*dharma*' and '*deen*' (religion; perhaps more accurately, 'way of life') and to 'save the country'. As explained, it did not form part of the national movement, nor can it be seen as the dying 'throes of the old order'.

As Ray argued, the 1857 Rebellion was a patriotic war of the people who expressed their sense of national identity through the brotherhood of the two principal religious groups of a common land. Ideologically, it reflected a fetal national community that was opposed to civil society, which had outposts in the enclaves of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Factors of racial subjugation created a sense of oneness that was, however, untainted by ideas of national sovereignty. The Great Rebellion of 1857 could express itself only through the political vocabulary of restoration that the people were accustomed to. It was marked by a disjunction from the past in the way people's power expressed itself through the sepoy councils. Consequently, even while the Great Rebellion failed to generate a new order, it was unrecognisable to tradition itself. The white man – and not the Great Rebellion – had turned the world upside down. What was attempted during the Great Rebellion was to turn it back. However, as the old order had been transformed, it could never be restored.

Consequently, one needs to underline the fact that the Great Rebellion of 1857 was a major anti-colonial movement that symbolised resistance against the aggression of imperialist policies over the first half of the nineteenth century. It was a mass political struggle and was not based only on 'economic' factors. Besides shaking the foundations of colonial rule, the Great Rebellion inspired the anti-colonial imagination as well as anti-colonial movements.[43] At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that the active involvement of the landed sections perhaps did fetter the peasants and tribals who played a major role in 1857.

There have been serious efforts to work on the Great Rebellion of 1857 and, perhaps in a few years, many hitherto invisible aspects of 1857 will be unveiled, adding to its richness and diversity. One can only hope that these will undermine recent 'best seller,' 'popular history' projects that see the Rebellion in crudely simplistic terms as a 'clash of civilisations' and compare it with 9/11, by talking of the *jehadis* (Islamic fundamentalists) 'then' and 'now'. Besides being unable to comprehend the contextual location and meanings of terms such as *jehadis*, such writings echo classic imperialist assertions that seem to have remained frozen over 150 years and which harp on the religious aspect of 1857.[44]

Transgressions, contests and diversities

This book situates the Great Rebellion within a framework of social history over a timeframe that extends from the 1830s to the 1870s. A serious attempt has been made to incorporate hitherto untapped sources. A conscious effort has been made to incorporate certain ignored diversities related to the Great Rebellion. Alongside, this book also develops some themes and issues that have attracted scholars who have studied 1857. By emphasising the aggressive zeal of imperialist expansion and the resistance it faced, the contributions counter the efforts of imperialist historiography to confine the Rebellion to a narrow 1857–58 timeframe and to a geographical space that is synonymous with 'north' India.

Talking of diverse sections and their interactions with the Great Rebellion, Shashank S. Sinha and Sanjukta Das Gupta explore the Chotanagpur tract and focus on tribal society and insurgency. They highlight fascinating characteristics related to popular mentalities and the forms of protest that were witnessed during this turbulent phase. Biswamoy Pati and B. Rama Chandra Reddy bring to light the world of tribals and their confrontations with imperialism in Orissa and present-day Andhra Pradesh respectively. While both of them refer to the pre-history of the Great Rebellion in order to highlight the opposition to imperialist expansion and exploitation, Pati's chapter focuses on the nature of the contradictions, leading to colonial rule being challenged through guerrilla warfare in parts of western and northern Orissa, echoes of which were audible even in the 1860s.

Madhurima Sen examines the repressive system of the colonial prison and penal laws that made it a major source of discontent, a theme that has attracted scholars such as Clare Anderson.[45] As can be expected, this meant a series of jail breaks during the Great Rebellion, for example in Bengal. As Sen tells us, the colonial establishment restructured itself over this tumultuous phase and incorporated components from Indian society, such as the caste system. Thus, she refers to the punishment meted out to the rebels that included 'transportation for life' across the 'black waters' (*Kala pani* – black sea or ocean) so as to develop a penal colony in the Andamans. Besides the effort to erase the rebels from public memory and render them anonymous, it

implied excommunication in terms of caste. This latter aspect was based on what was perceived by the colonial administration as an indigenous belief system that a person's caste identity was lost upon crossing the *Kala pani*.

Two chapters in this collection unravel aspects of gender and its association with the Great Rebellion. Lata Singh weaves in the story of a courtesan – a rather destabilising figure when it comes to nationalist historiography. Taking up Azeezun of Kanpur, she highlights the role of these 'fallen' and invisibilised women in 1857. Alongside, Indrani Sen's chapter explores the trope of the 'loyal Indian woman' in colonial 'mutiny' fiction. Sen shows how this fiction, written in the context of deep colonial insecurities in the aftermath of the Rebellion, assumed particular significance as it sought to construct the idea of Indian acceptance of colonial rule in the minds of its readers. This chapter extends our understanding of gender and 'mutiny' fiction that has attracted scholars such as Jenny Sharpe and Nancy Paxton.[46]

This book also explores the poor, 'marginal' whites, who had been recruited to strengthen the counter-insurgency operations and were subsequently disbanded after the Great Rebellion had been crushed. This was an 'unpleasant' section of the white population in India both for the coloniser and imperialist historiography', which explains the latter's silence about the white 'marginals'. Sarmistha De delineates the post-1858 presence of these 'white' marginals and the efforts of the colonial administration to negotiate them. Her chapter adds a completely new dimension to the existing scholarship on the 1857 Rebellion.

Talking of erasure of memory, Amar Farooqui explores the efforts of the colonialists to specially target the Mughal family. This drive included serious efforts to invisibilise the Mughals by exiling them and 'sanitising' memories related to the Great Rebellion. By highlighting the profound insecurities that gripped the colonial administration in the aftermath of 1857, Farooqui's contribution introduces a rather ignored feature. As delineated, this phenomenon lasted well into the 1870s, even when British colonialism seemed to be firmly established in India.

Finally, Rajsekhar Basu's chapter delves into questions related to the *Adi Dravida* (untouchables) interpretations of 1857 to unravel Dalit memories related to it. By taking up the Tamil-speaking areas of the Madras presidency, Basu examines the limitations of a 'grand narrative' that overlooks the complexities of marginal groups whose memories and interpretations of the Great Rebellion have specificities. In this sense, he not only complements the research of Badri Narayan who, as mentioned earlier, has worked on Dalit memories in northern India,[47] but also that of N. Rajendran, who has stressed the 'presence' of the 1857 Rebellion in south India.[48]

This book incorporates contributions without adhering to any single methodological frame in order to capture the flavour of a movement that was – if anything – marked by fascinating diversities, shifts and changes. The diversity of methodology also seeks to underline the varied ways in which 1857 has been explored, studied and perceived. In this sense, the different

chapters in this collection need to be 'read' both individually and holistically. It is hoped that this book contributes to the ongoing debates associated with the Great Rebellion by directing the attention of readers to some of the areas that have attracted scholarly attention and also certain new areas that have eluded scholars. This would perhaps enable us to be aware of the complex intricacies and nuances of a subject that remains largely unexplored even after more than 150 years.

Notes

1 It should perhaps be mentioned that there were risings by sepoys prior to 1857. One can mention here the Vellore mutiny of July 1806. Indian sepoys had revolted against the East India Company's garrison. Nevertheless, 'order' was restored very soon, and this revolt did not go beyond the confines of the cantonment. Here, one has perhaps to keep in mind the relatively new presence of imperialism in the Madras presidency, as opposed to mid-nineteenth-century northern India, where it had stabilised considerably owing to its large-scale economic and political interventions. Alongside, it needs to be clarified that the discontent in the colonial army was something that continued; for details, see Alavi (1995: 259–63; 294–95).
2 Habib (1998: 6–15).
3 There were numerous accounts written by contemporaries; the earliest account that can perhaps be considered representative includes Ball (1858–59); see also Kaye (1988 [1864–76]). For a comprehensive discussion on the different historical interventions related to the Great Rebellion, see Pati (2007).
4 To get an idea about colonial expansion and exploitation over the first half of the nineteenth century, see Chandra (1999); Bandyopadhyay (2004); Ramusack (2004); and Ernst and Pati (2007: 1–14).
5 Talking of imperialist expansion and the politics of 'mapping', one is tempted to refer to the fascinating work of Carter (1987).
6 The Wahabi uprising was an anti-British and anti-feudal movement that was punctuated by an egalitarian outlook and led by Titu Mir (1771–1831), a resident of Baduria in 24 Parganas. The Farazi movement, 1838–48, originated in Faridpur and spread to Dacca, Khulna and 24 Parganas. It was led by Dudu Mian. Its popularity rested on its simple egalitarian doctrine: that all land and all wealth should be equally enjoyed by the common folk.
7 See Sharpe (1993); see also Sen (2002).
8 Syed Khan (2000).
9 See Khan (1860).
10 I have skipped the early efforts of nationalists such as Savarkar who wrote a tract on the Rebellion (Savarkar 1909) or the fact that the first session of the Indian National Congress (1885) had denounced the Rebellion, given its association with the British and its 'loyalist' and elite character.
11 Datta (1967); Chaudhuri (1965); Sen (1957); Majumdar (1957). Interestingly, some present-day scholars continue to be haunted by this method and refer to the 'autonomy' of the sepoys; see, for example, Dasgupta (2008: 161–76).
12 Sen (1957: 411–12).
13 Chaudhuri (1965: 299).
14 See Engels and Marx (1975) and Dutt (1970 [1940]: 195, 306).
15 For a survey of this dimension, see Guha (1983) and Pati (1989).
16 In fact, after taking over India in 1858, the Crown sought to restructure the relationship with the princes so as to incorporate them; for details, see Ernst and Pati (2007: 1–14).

17 Joshi (2007 [1957]).
18 See also Joshi (1994).
19 This part weaves in a chapter by Ashraf in Joshi (2007 [1957]: 86–92).
20 Khan (2006, unpublished).
21 Khan (1998: 25–38).
22 In fact, after the 1950s and 1960s, the use of Urdu and Persian sources had been almost shelved. One can cite here some of the contributions in a special issue of the *Social Scientist,* 1998, on the 1857 Rebellion that incorporated Urdu sources. In fact, Shireen Moosvi (who had edited this issue) had also remarked about the decline of Urdu in India, which meant that a lot of unpublished material lying at the different archives had remained untapped.
23 The problem of sources remains as a stumbling block even at a time when interest in the Rebellion has been increasing; thus, besides Indian language sources and oral traditions that need to be compiled, issues of *The Calcutta Review* contain fascinating materials that remain largely untapped as it is available only in very few repositories.
24 One can mention here Shireen Moosvi, 'Rebel Press, Delhi 1857', in Moosvi (2008).
25 Stokes (1978: 185–204).
26 See C.A. Bayly's 'Concluding Note' in Stokes (1986). Stokes (1986) focuses on popular protest; see pp. 226–43.
27 See Mukherjee (1984: 157–70).
28 Mukherjee (1984: 166); emphasis Mukherjee's.
29 Mukherjee (1984) explains the motives of the peasants that created the basis of popular protest, by referring to the removal of the *talukdars* and the problems posed by the new revenue demands, which caused insecurities and anxieties. These were reinforced by the removal of the king and the range of fears about religion and caste. And, together with the imposition of British rule, these created fears and anger among the entire agrarian population about the collapse of the traditional order of inter-dependence between the ruler and the peasants. He also refers to issues related to the 'moral economy' of the peasant. Subsequently, Mukherjee has written on themes related to 1857, which include Mukherjee (1998, 2005).
30 See Roy (1994: 218–47).
31 *Jacquerie* refers to popular peasant revolts in France; here, Roy uses the term to indicate the popular basis of the peasant movements in the Bundelkhand region during the 1857 movement.
32 The auctioneers and decree-holders refer to the people who had emerged as land-holders through auctioning of land when the owners who held them failed to pay their taxes and the courts were involved in settling disputes by issuing decrees. The anger against the merchants was related to moneylending, with high interest rates.
33 Obviously, the reference here is to the 'enquiries' instituted by the colonial administration to punish the rebels involved in the Great Rebellion.
34 Roy has also written popular accounts such as Roy (2006).
35 For details, see Guha (1983: 16, 21–22, 25–27, 51–52, 71, 95, 103–6, 138). Guha's greatest limitation was his effort to 'confine' the *jacqueries* during 1857 to local boundaries (Guha 1983: 308).
36 See Bhadra (1985: 256–63).
37 Bhadra (1985: 259).
38 Bhadra (1985: 263).
39 Singh (1998: 76–85).
40 Narayan (1998: 86–94).
41 Badri Narayan, 'Dalits and Memories of 1857' in Bhattacharya (2007).
42 See Ray (2003: 353–60).
43 One needs to put in a note of caution here in the context of the very recent effort to revive the linear link between the Great Rebellion and Gandhian nationalism,

which is a distinct legacy of the nationalist school that we have discussed earlier. Besides being the general tone of the state-sponsored celebrations meant to observe the 150th anniversary of 1857 (in 2007), one can also refer to Nayar (2007), who attempts this unhistorical exercise.

44 I have in mind here Dalrymple (2006); for a critique, see Farhat Hasan, 'Religion in the History of 1857' in Moosvi (2008: 135–42).

45 Anderson (2007).

46 Sharpe (1993) and Paxton (1999).

47 Badri Narayan, 'Dalits and Memories of 1857' in Bhattacharya (2007); one needs perhaps to add here that Gupta (2008: 193–212) focuses on Dalit women.

48 Rajendran (2007a: 193).

2 1857 and the adivasis of Chotanagpur

Shashank S. Sinha

Chotanagpur offers a brilliant example of how an event (the Great Rebellion of 1857)[1] can have multiple contours in a region. Factors such as desire for independence, political opportunism, traditional rivalries, ecology, religion and economic survival are so closely interwoven in the region that it is difficult to explain the rebellion in terms of dominant singular explanations. 1857 created new tensions but also gave vent to many existing ones. What is interesting to note, however, is how existing tensions intersected with the dynamics generated by sepoy mutinies and changing political configurations to acquire an anti-colonial texture. This is where the strength of the spirit of 1857 lay.

Chotanagpur experienced a short but pronounced phase of sepoy mutinies between July and October 1857. There was a pattern in these mutinies as sepoy units from Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, Purulia (Manbhum) and Singhbhum were found marching towards the regional centre Ranchi after looting local treasuries, attacking official bungalows and buildings, destroying government records and breaking jails and releasing prisoners. Once in Ranchi, they made serious efforts to enlarge their social base by not only mobilizing influential local *zamindars* but also sending emissaries to other districts. They even set up a government and proclaimed a *padshahi raj* (Mughal emperor's rule).[2]

While sepoy mutinies did provide the underlying current, there were both inter- and intra-district variations in the civilian movements known for remarkable involvement of adivasis.[3] The civil/adivasi movements kept alive the spirit of resistance even after the suppression of 'mainstream' sepoy mutinies following the Battle of Chatra (October 1857) and continued to harass colonial rule until as late 1861.

This chapter is divided into four sections which together cover the 1857 experience in Chotanagpur. The first presents a brief critique of available literature and hints at alternative understanding(s) of the rebellion in the region. The next documents the regional variations underscoring the involvement of adivasis and their interactions with sepoy/other rebellious activities. The third part investigates the debates and assertions surrounding the Kol rebellion in Singhbhum. The last segment examines incidents of mass witch-hunts during 1856–57 and argues how they could be linked to resistance against colonial rule.

Alternative understanding(s)

Using evidence and examples from the adivasi movements discussed subsequently, this chapter makes the following arguments.

First, it would be somewhat incorrect to say, as Romila Thapar and Majid H. Siddiqi do, that the adivasis of Chotanagpur remained uninvolved in the events of 1857. Thapar and Siddiqi argue that the main reason behind the neutrality of the tribals was the absence of links that could make them regard the rebellious *zamindars* as their natural leaders.[4] It is true that not all the tribes of Chotanagpur participated in the events surrounding 1857 – the Mundas and Oraons of Ranchi kept themselves aloof, while the Santhals of Santhal Parganas did not play any part. The adivasi movements in Chotanagpur were indeed largely confined to Hazaribagh, Singhbhum and Palamau. Further, the kind of clan and kinship ties binding the rebellious peasants and *zamindars* in Oudh (Awadh) and Bihar were also not characteristically present in Chotanagpur. However, the movements in Singhbhum and Palamau show that the adivasis did make joint fronts with the regional ruling elite to pose a serious challenge to the colonial administration. Their participation also changed the character of the civilian movements and some, such as the Chero–Bogta uprising, earned the epithet of the 'best-known episode of tribal outbreak' during 1857.[5]

Second, although the adivasi movements were violent and led by adivasis or other chiefs, they were not essentially 'elemental' or 'spontaneous'.[6] In Palamau for example in the case of the Chero–Bogta alliance, one comes across unusual strategic partnerships between hill peasants (Bogtas) and *jagirdars* (Cheros) against common enemies – the Rajput *jagirdars* (*thakurs*) and, later, the colonial administration. Such alliances also demonstrate how adivasis were able to transcend what Ranajit Guha[7] calls their 'ethnic space' to form joint fronts with sepoys and other rebels. Theorizing peasant/tribal movements in colonial India, Guha has argued that the tribe was not merely the initiator of the rebellion but its site as well, and the notion of ethnic space constituted an important element in the territoriality of the rebellions.

Third, the adivasi movements in Chotanagpur were not only linked to sepoy mutinies but also had some connection, sometimes remote, with the 'mainstream' movements. The *talapatras* (palm leaf letters) seized by Lt Birch at Kordiha (site of the Kol rebellion) in Singhbhum – carrying references to the Emperor of Delhi, Nana Sahib and Kunwar Singh – reflected an awareness of the larger events and also an expectation of help from those quarters.[8] Similarly, the baggage discovered by Col. Dalton and Lt Graham after the fall of the Palamau Fort contained letters from Amar Singh to Nilambar and Pitambar Sahi and Naklaut Manjhi promising immediate assistance from Kunwar Singh.[9]

Regional variations

Hazaribagh

The Santhal stirrings in Hazaribagh and Manbhum during 1857 were also manifestations of an unresolved Santhal question. While the creation of a new

district of Santhal Parganas (after the brutal suppression of the Santhal *Hul* or rebellion of 1855–56) did give some respite to the Santhals of the immediate region, their brethren in Hazaribagh and Manbhum (which also formed a part of the *Hul*) did not get any ameliorative benefits. The sepoy mutiny in Hazaribagh therefore gave them a chance to settle their accounts with moneylenders and, in some places, their plunders even posed problems for the colonial administration.

Santhal lootings and murders became increasingly problematic in the second half of September and they were joined by local hoodlums. They plundered several villages in Gola and Chas. At Mandu, they were exhorted by three local land holders to commit murders and plunder the village.[10] The Santhals also surrounded the house of a relative of the Maharaja of Ramgarh (the principal collaborator of the British in Chotanagpur) at Jharpo (14 miles from Hazaribagh). Following a battle with British forces, a group led by Rupu Manjhi attacked the same house again on 16 September 1857.[11]

Whether the Santhals joined the sepoys or not is a question which continues to be debated, with some scholars empathically pointing to a joint action.[12] For Dalton, 'it was quite apparent that the Santhals were in league with the mutineers'. Their zone of depredation, he wrote, had become the 'most disturbed part of Chotanagpur'. He even accused them of establishing their own system of government and 'levying contributions'.[13] The Santhals continued their activities even after the defeat of the sepoys at the Battle of Chatra. Around 10,000 people burnt a *thana* (police station), looted Esmea Chatti (at Hazaribagh) and attempted to cut off communications between Hazaribagh and Ranchi.[14] Later, a group plundered Gomea and burnt government buildings and records. Like the Santhals, the dispossessed Bhuiya Tikaits, in the north of Hazaribagh district, saw in the 1857 disturbances an opportunity to recover their lands from old purchasers.[15]

Manbhum

The Santhals of Manbhum were restive when the sepoys of the Ramgarh Regiment reached Purulia on 5 August. They rebelled and attacked the *zamindar* of Jaipur and looted and murdered many in that place.[16] The possibilities of a widespread insurrection were, however, contained in Manbhum by the timely arrest of the Raja of Panchet, Nilmoni Singh. He was arrested and sent to Calcutta only to be released in March 1859.[17]

Palamau

The immediate cause of the Chero–Bogta uprising in Palamau was provided by sepoy activities in Ranchi and Hazaribagh. Dalton says:

> it unluckily happened that Pitambar Bogtah (Bogta) was at Ranchee (Ranchi) when the Ramgarh Force mutinied and the officers abandoned the station. He very possibly went home thinking he had seen the end of

> the British rule. At the same time two companies of the 8th Regiment Native Infantry—which had mutinied at Hazaribagh—marched through Palamau on their way to join Baboo Kooer Singh's (Kunwar Singh) brother Ummar Singh (Amar Singh) at 'Rohtas Ghur'.[18]

Nilambar and Pitambar Sahi were *ilaqadars* (tenure holders) from the village of Chemu and their father, the deceased chief of the Bogta tribe,[19] had died as an outlaw, losing all proprietary claims to his estate. His estates were given to the two sons in the form of a *jagir* (land holding) with a nominal quit-rent. The mutiny at Hazaribagh and Ranchi encouraged them to strive for complete independence.[20]

A crucial element in the spread and percolation of the movement in Palamau was the formation of the Chero–Bogta alliance. The last Chero Raja, Churaman Rai, had died childless, leaving behind a widow. There were three collateral branches of the family represented by Bhawani Baksh Rai of Bisrampore, Babu Ram Baksh Rai of Chukla and Babu Devi Baksh Rai of Luckna. On 25 September, Bhawani Baksh Rai arrived at Shahpore (at the residence of the widowed queen) and apparently summoned the Cheros to a meeting. It is believed that the object of the meeting was either to elect a Chero Raja or to discuss the safety of the district. Whatever may have been the underlying motive, it is a fact that the meeting was followed by a general rising of the Cheros and Kharwars. In October, a force of about 500 Bogtas joined by Kharwars and Cheros attacked Chainpur, Shahpur and Lesligunj under the leadership of Nilambar and Pitambar.[21] Both Dalton and Jagdish Narayan Sarkar argue that Chero participation was linked to a desire for economic gains. The rulers of Palamau had created a large body of Chero *jagirdars* by giving them land, most of whom had subsequently mortgaged their estates. Dalton says that the hope of summarily voiding such encumbrances was an incentive to many proprietors to join the insurgents.[22] Sarkar underlines this 'sordid aspect', as different from the lofty impulse of freeing the country from foreign yoke, as the underlying objective.[23]

The first target of the Chero–Bogta alliance was Thakurai Ragubar Singh Dayal – not only a common enemy but also a protégé of the British. The movement quickly spread in the interiors of Palamau despite agent *zamindars* trying to stem the tide.[24] At Lesliegunge, the rebels burnt the *thana* and *Abkaree Cutcheries* (courts), set fire to the *Tuhseel Cutcherry* and destroyed five other villages. Later, they plundered and destroyed a coal factory at Rajhara and burnt government *thanas* at Munirka and Chutterpore.[25] By the end of November, the whole region was in arms, and Lt Graham and his small party were shut up and besieged in the house of Raghubar Dayal while the rebels were looting in all directions.[26]

An interesting feature of the movement was an attempt by the rebels to link up with the Shahabad forces of Kunwar and Amar Singh, also compatriots from Hazaribagh. Palamau's ecology – its extensive forests and natural links with Shahabad – made the region a safe haven and refuge for many Ranchi mutineers. After their defeat at the Battle of Chatra, they tried to join up with

Chero (Devi Baksh Rai and Parmanand Kunda) and Bogta leaders (Nilambar and Pitambar Sahi).[27] In March 1858, Ganpat Rai and Biswanath Sahi (leaders of the sepoys and survivors of the Battle of Chatra) assembled around 1,100 men in the Nawagarh Hills with a view to attacking Lohardagga.[28] Ecology thus played an important role in the alignment of forces and also affected the course of the movement in Palamau. Nilambar and Pitambar would retreat into the hills and forests whenever hunted and thereby defied arrest for a very long period. Such was the impact of the movement in Palamau that, in January 1858, Dalton himself advanced to the Bogta country with 140 men under Major MacDonell and remained there until the end of February. However, he could not manage to capture the two brothers; neither threats nor promises had any effect in inducing the residents to reveal their hiding places.[29]

It would be wrong to assume that the movement in Palamau ended with the arrest and execution of Nilambar and Pitambar Bogta. The evidence in fact suggests a horizontal expansion in the movement. After the death of Kunwar Singh in April 1858, the Shahabad mutineers made serious efforts to contact the disaffected Bogtas to keep alive the resistance. Until the end of November 1858, around 1,100 rebels actually entered Palamau under Seadha Singh and Ram Bahadur Singh, and 600 of these possessed sepoys' muskets. Another 900 were reportedly converging on the Saneya. Several British documents express concern over Shahabad rebels entering Palamau and the necessity for more troops.[30] The British were able to get Palamau and adjoining territories evacuated by all mutineers and rebels flocking from Bihar and Shahabad only by 1859.

Singhbhum

As far as the Kol[31] involvement in the events surrounding 1857 in Singhbhum is concerned, there are two distinct phases. The first phase (July–November 1857) is largely characterized by mobilization of Kols by the Raja of Porahat (Arjun Singh) locked in a 'battle of supremacy' with the Raja of Saraikela (Chakradhar Singh). The second phase, however (November 1857–61), sees Kols clashing with the colonial administration. This happened soon after Arjun Singh was attacked and driven away from his kingdom. The sudden flight of the district officer Captain Sissimore – in the wake of a sepoy mutiny at Hazaribagh – marked the resurfacing of the traditional rivalry between the Porahat and Saraikela families 'transmitted from father to son for several generations'.[32] A fleeing Sissimore left the district under the protection of Chakradhar Singh, which irked Arjun Singh who considered himself the 'Raja of Singhbhum' by tradition.

Meanwhile, on 3 September, the sepoys of Ramagarh Battalion stationed at Chaibasa rebelled. They plundered the government treasury, broke open jails and made attempts to join the militant sepoys at Doranda in Ranchi. Some 300–400 Kols loyal to the Raja of Porahat assembled at the River Sanjay to

prevent the sepoys marching off with the treasure. Arjun Singh's decision to cut off the sepoys' onward march, give them shelter and employ them on his rolls at Chakradharpur fort created complications between Lt Birch (the senior assistant commissioner of Chaibasa) and the Raja of Porahat. When Birch requested the assistance of Hos against the rebel sepoys, they declined saying that the latter had gathered at the Raja of Porahat's invitation, so they could not use their weapons against them.[33]

The district was now divided into two hostile camps engaged in a propaganda war in which Arjun Singh's advisers – Jaggu Diwan, Shyam Karna, Raghudeo and Nagpuria Mukhtar – played a key part. Two conferences were called at Chakradharpur and Ayodhya where several *mankis* and *mundas* (traditional village heads) were sworn to be faithful to Arjun Singh. They were exhorted not to side either with the government or with the Raja of Saraikela but to take up Arjun Singh's cause and die for him. On 11 September, Shyam Karna Singh got a proclamation circulated by the beating of drums at Chaibasa bazaar that 'everything belonged to God, that country belonged to the King, and that the ruler thereof was Arjun Singh'. Preparations were made to invade Saraikela from an advance post established at Ayodhya with a fix date on 22 September. Dabru Manki brought an arrow (a symbol of insurrection among the Kols) before Birch saying that it had been given to him for circulation in Kolhan. This was further confirmed by the depositions of Mora Manki and Hari Tanti; the latter had reportedly received the arrow directly from the Raja.[34] Birch issued an order declaring Arjun Singh a rebel, confiscating his estate and offering a reward of 1000 rupees for his capture, notwithstanding the former's offer to surrender the treasury, arms and sepoys.[35] This order came on 22 September, the very day Ranchi was reoccupied by Dalton.

Finally, on 20 November, the king of Porahat was attacked. He fled but his key adviser Jaggu Diwan, was arrested and summarily executed by the authorities in the centre of the *bazar*.[36] Up to this point, the animosity between the Raja of Porahat and Saraikela dominated local politics, and the situation did not have an overt anti-colonial twist. Dalton says 'up to this period, he (Arjun Singh) had probably not quite made up his mind to rebel, but driven from his house and his property seized, he and his followers appear to have flung themselves headlong into revolt'.[37] At the end of December 1857, Lushington (who had been temporarily appointed special commissioner for Manbhum and Singhbhum) reported a widespread insurrection in the district.[38]

The thrust of the movement now changed and the anti-colonial component became very conspicuous. What ensued was a series of confrontations between the British supported by the Rajas of Saraikela and Kharaswan, on the one side, and Arjun Singh supported by Kols, on the other. There was also a shift in base: from Porahat to Koordiha (where Arjun Singh had shifted after the fall of Porahat). Bhadra argues that there was a further shift in the structure of resistance to colonial administration. Initially, it was the

tribal people and their chiefs who provided the main thrust of the revolt against the government. However, 'once the insurrection gained momentum, the chiefs fell behind and an initiative began to grow from below'.[39] He talks about an 'autonomous' movement of the Kols, asserting that 'the mutiny of the Ramgarh battalion was transformed into a rebellion of the Kols'. Further,

> the people headed by their chiefs, appealed to Raja to perform his traditional role as a leader of the whole people at a time when the belief had gained ground that the authority of the English had vanished and all the older ties between king, headmen, and people had been revived. The will of the people thus merged with royal consent, inaugurating the rebellion as the project of the entire community.[40]

The leadership of this subaltern movement was provided by Gonoo, a Kol inhabitant of Jyunteegarh in Barpeer.

Bhadra argues that

> it was the displacement of authority both at the supra-local level of the colonial regime and at the local level of the Porahat Raj that helped to generate among the rebels the sense of an alternative authority and invest a law-breaker from the family of law breakers[41] with a new legitimacy for his role as a leader.[42]

He cites some testimonies and depositions outlining the emergence of Gonoo. Dalton also describes Gonoo as 'a notorious leader of the insurgents during the disturbances of 1857–58' and the 'most active adherent of the ex-rajah of Porahat amongst Singhbhum or Larka Kols and the principal agent in spreading disaffection amongst them and the leader of the men of the tribe'.[43]

Bhadra says Gonoo first established himself as one of the triumvirate (besides Raghudeo and Shyam Karna), but soon constituted himself as the 'chief of Singhbhum'. He was involved in disciplining traitors and informers and one, Budho Mahato, was killed on suspicion of being a *meriah* (spy).[44] The *bazar* of the Thakur of Kera, an English loyalist, was attacked and plundered. The Kols also attacked and destroyed the Jyunteegarh police station.[45] There was a severe fight between Kols and Lushington's forces at Chaisbasa on 14 January 1858, and the latter had to ask for reinforcements from Col. Forster commanding a Shekawatee Battalion at Chaundil camp. Pitched battles between British forces and the Arjun Singh camp and the Kols continued throughout 1858. On 18 December 1858, two bands of rebels plundered and burnt three Ho villages (whose inhabitants had recently submitted to the British) in the vicinity of Karah. In February 1859, the Porahat chief surrendered with his brothers and a large number of insurgent leaders, but without two of the three principal leaders, Raghudeo and Shyam Karna. The local chiefs continued their offensives and 'incendiarism' until as late as the middle of 1861.[46]

Rethinking the 'Kol rebellion' in Singhbhum

Arjun Singh, Gonoo and the Kols did give the British a tough time. The preceding discussion, however, provokes some very pertinent questions. What was the role of the Kols in the events surrounding the 1857 Rebellion? Was 'Gonoo's movement' an instance of subaltern autonomy? Was the rebellion a 'project of the entire Kol community'?

The available literature (Gautam Bhadra's piece included) further problematizes these questions. Bhadra himself acknowledges that the source base is scarce and fragmentary. Given the demographic profile of the Singhbhum region, the earlier history of Kol resistance, their love of fighting and their familiarity with the local terrain, every attempt was made to enlist their support, whether by friendly gestures or by force. A big propaganda drive was also launched to mobilize their support. Nagpuria Mukhtar (an Arjun Singh loyalist) was summoning the Kols and telling them that the English had abandoned the country, which had now become the property of the Porahat Raja. He even implored Arjun Singh to come to Chaibasa and take possession of the district.[47] This was also the precise objective of two conferences called by the Arjun Singh camp.

The propaganda that 'British rule in India had terminated' had become so pervasive that Birch had a hard time trying to convince the Kols that he was an 'accredited officer of government' and not an agent of the 'Copper Company' ('Copper Mine Sahib' as he was called).[48] One of the important ways in which the British sought to solicit the support of the Kols was through the administration of an oath of loyalty. This had been resorted to on many occasions in the past. After the suppression of the Kol Rebellion (1831), some *mankis* and *mundas* were made functionaries of the British government in Singhbhum, and they bound themselves by an oath taken to that effect before the agent to the Governor General. Bhadra says this amounted to the transfer of their allegiance to a new authority.[49] Soon after the outbreak of the Rebellion, Birch was also trying to reassure the 'waverers' and emphasize the 'renewal of their former oath to the government'.[50] Birch also tried to woo the Kols by 'presenting necklaces to their women and tobacco to men'. Likewise, the methods deployed by the Arjun Singh camp to mobilize the Kols hinged around the use of symbols and gestures intrinsically connected, if not exclusively identifiable, with them. The use of drums (an instrument mostly used for the aural transmission of insurgency) for circulating proclamations and war arrows (a traditional method of transmission of war-like messages) also had an underlying objective. The support of the Kols was very crucial, and Jaggu Diwan (and later Gonoo) even threatened them with plunder of their cattle and destruction of their villages if they refused to co-operate.[51]

In the absence of adequate statistical data, it is difficult to say anything concrete about the quantitative aspect of Kol participation. What can, however, be argued with greater certainty is that their active involvement after November 1857 did change the nature of the rebellion – investing a popular

character to an erstwhile dynastic rivalry. Whether the 'war loving Kols' were acting solely on the instigation of the Raja of Porahat (as Bradley Birt would argue) or also had their own reasons to revolt is an important question to ask. While there might be some substance in the first part, there are also grounds to support the latter argument: uncritical adherence to the former therefore reduces all possibilities of subaltern agency. British rule in Singhbhum had brought about some fundamental changes, and there was definite discontent among the inhabitants. The system of written oaths, annual visits by the commissioner, insistence on regular payment of tax, attempts to increase the rate of assessment and to change the mode of assessment[52] had led to the creation of a new situation in the Kol heartland. British rule had not only affected the traditional power structure but also the village society, and the response of the Hos to the Porahat Raja's call for rebellion was also reflective of their general disenchantment.[53] Birch wrote to Dalton that around a quarter of the Kolhan's Kols were ready to take arms in Arjun Singh's cause.[54]

Coming to Gonoo's movement, there is no doubt that he was an important figure in the Rebellion. However, to ascribe to him a completely 'autonomous' plan of action would be a little too simplistic. There is not much information available on his area of operation. Closely connected to Arjun Singh, he also emerged as the leader of the Barpeer Kols, but his actions and depredations were mostly confined to areas around Barpeer. Bhadra also overlooks the element of threat and violence in the mobilization of the Kols, although he mentions how such methods were utilized by Gonoo and his followers.[55] Gonoo used the threat of collective violence to enforce co-operation from the vacillating elements within the community and also threatened the Chynepore Manki with burning his village if the required cattle and coolies were not provided.[56]

Besides, there were other leaders who were equally if not more influential such as Raghudeo and Shyam Karna. They continued the struggle even after the arrest of Arjun Singh. Gonoo accepted in his trial that he was 'not a leader' but a 'mere follower of the Rajah' and that he had taken to rebellion at the behest of the Porahat Raja and derived authority from him. Although an important leader of the movement, Das Gupta says that Gonoo's rebellion was instigated by the old royal family of the district with whom the Hos had ties of dependence and loyalty over a long time. It reflects the fact that the ties between the Hos and the Rajas of Singhbhum had not completely dissipated despite the preceding 20 years of British rule. This also goes against stereotypical projections of the Hos as 'stateless' people owing allegiance to none, who considered the Rajas of Singhbhum as friends and allies rather than as their rulers.[57] Finally, Bhadra's assertion that the rebellion was the 'project of the entire community' also needs to be taken with a certain caution. He underplays the fact that half of the *mundas* and *mankis* who had earlier been incorporated in the colonial administrative setup (by giving them revenue and police powers) remained loyal to their colonial masters.[58]

Resistance and witch-hunts[59]

There were surely other methods of extra-political resistance through which the Kols counteracted colonial intrusion. Bhadra does acknowledge elsewhere that 'all administrative regulations like the ban on witch-hunts were systematically violated' during the upsurge.[60] However, he fails to see this as a conscious contour of resistance. Resistance to colonial rule among marginal societies was not always very 'direct' and 'visible'; therefore, what is required is a shift in focus from 'extraordinary moments of collective protest' to a 'variety of non-confrontational resistances and contestatory behaviour'.[61] Such actions, if one were to borrow Scott's expression, avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority but are not devoid of consciousness. The symbols, the norms, the ideological forms they create constitute the indispensable background to their behaviour, however 'imperfect or partial their understanding of the situation might be'.[62] The world of witches, spirits and *ojhas* (witch doctors and medicine men) was very vibrant and reflective; one that resonated with, yet contested, the impacts generated by colonial rule in myriad ways.[63] In the context of perceptive significance or fear of witches and *ojhas* (also known as *mati, sokha, jan guru*) in the adivasi world, administrative regulations and a systematic tirade against witch-hunts and ojhaism in the years preceding 1857 were challenged and defied. Witch-hunts therefore represented a mode of resistance, which was apparently less direct, seemingly less confrontationist and one with a greater community sanction.

The adivasis had long believed in the existence of evil spirits and witches. Accordingly, all diseases and mishaps were caused by 'mischievous' or 'evil spirits', witches or the 'evil-eye'. Dalton wrote:

> all diseases in men or animals is attributed to one of two causes, the wrath of some evil spirit who has to be appeased, or to the spell of some witch or sorcerer who should be destroyed or driven out of land.[64]

'There is no genuine Santal', wrote Bodding, 'who does not believe in witches. This being so, it is not strange that a suspicion is always present that witches may be at work when people fall ill and do not recover'.[65] Man noted: 'no reasoning with them, nor ridicule can dissuade them of their belief in witches, and of the necessity of their being at once murdered'.[66] There was therefore a conflict and contradiction between the adivasi and colonial health and medicinal systems, with the latter emphasizing the setting up of hospitals and the spread of education.

Wilkinson had directed,

> The conviction in the minds of the aboriginals that some persons have in their possession witch-craft causing illness or epidemic had to be liquidated. There should be an encouragement to bring the diseased to the hospitals and the doctors for a proper cure. The Medical Officer should be liberally encouraged to explain that medicine only can cure the disease

> and if this message of cure through proper medicine be spread, belief in witch-craft will decrease.[67]

Several follow-up actions were taken in this regard. By giving them police powers, the colonial state had entrusted *mankis* with the task of punishing such 'new crimes' as witch-hunting.[68] Later, Dalton took firm measures to put down the practice of 'soka' (witch-hunting). He declared it a crime for any person to practice a 'soka' or any person to employ a 'soka'. Cases of murder, which originated in witchcraft and in the power to be possessed by a 'soka', were to be treated as crime.[69]

One comes across some interesting similarities between Chotanagpur and the Dang region in western India for, at about the same time, the British also banned witch-hunts in the Dangs (1847) and the Rajputana (1853).[70] Skaria points out that most adivasis responded to the ban with hostility and resistance.[71] In his study on the Bhils of western India, Hardiman asserts that colonial administrators failed to acknowledge the degree to which the notion of witchcraft was socially embedded and universally believed in as a matter of common sense.[72] Ray Choudhury argues that the zeal with which the early British administrators in Singhbhum threw themselves into reforming the 'jungleterry' into a civilized tract was also partially responsible for the havoc that followed. He writes:

> It was mostly a case of mistaken wisdom and a result of not getting into the genius of the people and their mental framework before the policy was made. … To them [policy makers] the very ideas that went to make up the mental frame-work of the Hos were an anathema.[73]

The administrator, mostly recruited from the military, was in a state of perplexity. He cites a letter (no. 57 dated 21 October) in which the administrator was instructed that it was not expedient to treat the enticing away of a married adult woman as a criminal offence, while on the other hand he was given repeated instructions to fight the deep belief in witchcraft and 'Sokhaism'.[74] While the administrators were confused, the adivasis were agitated.

> The witches eat us and when we catch them and worry them just a little, the magistrates again turn the matter round and resort to imprisonment; we feel great distress; what can we possibly do, so that it might go well with us; we are utterly bewildered. Also when we explain it to magistrates they do not believe it; they say: Well then let her eat my finger, then only shall I believe she is a witch – and then they jail you. The witches do not eat using a vessel and a knife, quite so; by sorcery they send people off to the other world straightaway.[75]

The belief that witches were flourishing under the *benevolent power* of the British was increasingly gaining ground.

> Formerly the village headmen and his deputy were subduing them, and if they would not be peaceful, they would together with the village people, drive them away from the village after having disgraced them; but nowadays the magistrates have made them utterly audacious so that we men have become absolutely disheartened.[76]

So intense and widespread was the belief in witchcraft that a fracture had already occurred in the reporting of 'crimes' related to witch-hunting. Ricketts, in his report on the district of Singhbhum (1854), had noted that the *mankis* and *mundas* were reluctant to report cases of witch-hunting because it was no crime to the community.[77] Skaria points out that the general sympathy for witch-killers led to attempts by ordinary Bhils, their chiefs and even the local Rajput power-holders to conceal killings from the British.[78] To use Hardiman's words, 'the practice was driven underground rather than suppressed. … local holders of power took action against witches because they were convinced that they had a duty to preserve their society from malign supernatural forces'.[79]

The climax came during the political disturbances surrounding 1856–57 when the hold of the British administration was loosened. In his account of the *hul* (Santhal rebellion of 1855–56), Chotrae Deshmanjhi describes how a number of girls accused of witchcraft were shown 'the pod and pea' and slain.[80] Ball (who travelled through the region) similarly points out,

> during the disturbed times of the mutiny in 1857–58, when law was suspended in these regions, the Kols of Singbhum and other parts of the Province availed themselves of their freedom to make a clean sweep of the witches and sorcerers who had accumulated in their midst, under the benign influence of British authority.[81]

Although most killings went unreported, one could even see an unusual increase in the number of cases registered with the police. According to *Singhbhum Old Records*:

> The average of the previous five years was 7 cases in which 18 persons were implicated. The returns of 1859 exhibit 59 cases of murder, in which 218 persons were implicated. It appears, however that 50 of these cases occurred during the disturbances of 1857 and 1858, the people availing themselves of the temporary withdrawal of our authority to indulge in their superstitious desire of exterminating witchcraft.[82]

The determination to kill the witches is also borne out by the trials conducted after the Uprising.[83] As one of the killers in Bynteria pir stated: 'we saw ourselves that there was great confusion, fighting and killing and we [were] *determined* to kill our wizards and witches', at a time when 'the sahib's law was not functioning'[84] (emphasis added). Similarly, in another case, Sopaee, a Munda, testified: ' … The Bur peer was then in a disturbed state, and in all the

village it was *arranged* that all accused of witchcraft should be murdered'[85] (emphasis added).

Two things stand out here. First, after the ban on witch-hunts in the region (1853), the Hul and the 1857 Rebellion were the first occasions when the hold of the British administration was loosened. Witch-killing therefore also represented an attempt to reclaim a social space denied or restricted by the presence of the colonial administration. Second, available evidence also indicates the occasion of perhaps the first mass witch-hunts in Chotanagpur during 1856–57. This is also indicated by the sudden surge in the numbers of murders and first-class offences in contemporary accounts of the Rebellion.

Seen in the context of the larger politics of witchcraft in colonial India, the events during 1856–57 also demonstrated the latent potentiality of some kind of cultural resistance. Also, every major adivasi movement after 1856–57 had to address the question of spirits and witches in its agenda, and the domain of witchcraft was used politically to register resistance to colonial intrusion. K. Suresh Singh points to an *ulgulan* (Birsa Munda rebellion) song in which enemies of the tribes – witches, Europeans and other castes (dikus) – are placed in the same category:

> Oh kill the witch, such the poison,
> O kill, kill
> O Father, kill the Europeans, the other castes
> O kill, kill.[86]

A Tana Bhagat movement song is equally reflective of this trend.

> O Father Tana, pull out the enemies on the border,
> Pull out the witches and the spirits,
> Pull out the British Government.[87]

Conclusion

This chapter delineates an interesting intersection of local and what can clearly be defined as broader anti-imperialist tensions in a 'little known province of the Empire'.[88] It also raises some important methodological issues concerning the study of adivasi movements in colonial India. Thus, the adivasis did not always participate as a homogeneous group. In areas such as Hazaribagh, Singhbhum and Palamau where tribals participated, they defied stereotypical imagings. Besides being mobile, one witnesses adivasis uniting with non-adivasis and regional elites to fight against their local enemies and/or imperialist forces. Therefore, the experience of the 1857 Rebellion in Chotanagpur underlines the need to go beyond the framework of the 'subaltern historians' to understand tribal movements. It also underscores the possibilities of exploring culture as a site of resistance in the case of marginal societies. After all, as seen, features such as witchcraft assumed political overtones in the context of the 1857 Rebellion.

Notes

1 I have benefited enormously from the rich collection of primary documents in three sourcebooks compiled by Roy Chaudhury (1957, 1958, 1959).
2 For details, see Sinha (2007a: 120–42).
3 The notion of tribe as we understand it today had not crystallized around 1857. For this study, the word 'tribe' is being used interchangeably with 'adivasi' in a very neutral sense to distinguish a group of people so socially organized from caste (although some of the tribes have also become or are in the process of becoming castes), sharing some kind of group sentiment and generally (although as a rule not now) a common and specific territory. The socio-economic levels associated with them have never been fixed and permanent and should not convey a sense of complete isolation from the mainstream of Indian life: for, apart from some isolated and primitive food gatherers, the tribes or adivasis are, and have been, very much a part of Indian society as the lowest stratum of peasantry subsisting through plough cultivation, slash and burn agriculture or as agricultural labourers, plantation coolies or (later) workers in factories and mines. As far as the cultural characteristics go, although some tribes continue to practise their specific rituals, traditions, religion and taboos, most of them have become sufficiently Hinduized or Christianized over a period of time.
4 Thapar and Siddiqi (2003).
5 Singh (1998: 77).
6 Singh (1998: 77). Singh argues that the tribal movements from the end of the eighteenth century up to 1857 have been described as 'primary forms of resistance', 'elemental', 'spontaneous', 'violent' and led by tribal or other chiefs who aimed at overthrowing the colonial authority that had destroyed the old system.
7 Guha (1983: 286).
8 Bhadra (1985: 262).
9 Singh (1998: 79).
10 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 66–67).
11 Sur (1986: 54–56).
12 Sur (1986: 55).
13 E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chotanagpur to A.R. Young, Esq., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 29, dated 23 September 1857; Chotanagpur Commissioner's Dispatch Vol. 218, Bihar State Archives (henceforth BSA).
14 E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chotanagpur to A.R. Young, Esq., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No. 29, dated 23 September 1857; Chotanagpur Commissioner's Dispatch Vol. 218, BSA.
15 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 67).
16 Hazaribagh Old Records (1761–1878: 97).
17 Chatterjee (1956: 54).
18 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 117).
19 Bogtas formed one of the many clans of the Kharwar tribe, and they inhabited an elevated plateau area between the highlands of Sirjuga and the low country of Palamau.
20 Chatterjee (1956: 49).
21 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 96–97).
22 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 116).
23 Sarkar (1955: 529–71).
24 Roy Choudhury (1961: 71).
25 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 97).
26 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 97).
27 Singh (1998: 79).
28 Hazaribagh Old Records (1761–1878: 91).

29 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 99).
30 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 103–4).
31 Kols is a generic term used for Hos, the adivasi inhabitants of Singhbhum. In this chapter, these two terms are being used interchangeably.
32 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 78–79).
33 Das Gupta (2007: 106).
34 A.R. Young to Beadon, Secretary, Government to India, dated 3 November 1857; Home (Public) Consultations, No. 145–48 (A), dated 8 January 1858, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).
35 Kumar (1991: 246–47).
36 Bhadra (1985: 259).
37 Sur (1986: 53).
38 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 79).
39 Bhadra (1985: 256).
40 Bhadra (1985: 259).
41 Gonoo was a poor Kol 'who took to evil ways, thieving, and the like', came from a murky background and was labelled as a 'bad character'; 'his father died in jail for rebellion' and 'his brother was hanged'.
42 Bhadra (1985: 262).
43 Bhadra (1985: 260).
44 Bhadra (1985: 261–62).
45 Taylor (1996: 84).
46 Taylor (1996: 84).
47 Lushington to Government of Bengal, 29 December 1857, Home (Public) Consultations, No. 38, dated 29 January 1858, NAI.
48 Kumar (1991: 88).
49 Bhadra (1985: 257).
50 R.C. Birch to A.R. Young, dated 23 November 1857; Home (Public) Consultations, No. 147, dated 8 January, NAI.
51 Birch to Government dated 10 October 1857; Bengal Judicial Proceedings, No. 138, dated 12 November 1857, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA).
52 Bhadra (1985: 259).
53 Das Gupta (2007: 109).
54 Birch to Dalton dated 7 October 1857; Bengal Judicial Proceedings, No. 141/142, dated 12 November 1857, WBSA.
55 See Bhadra (1985: 262). Even Jaggu Dewan was reported to be a 'bad character'.
56 Bhadra (1985: 261–62).
57 Das Gupta (2007: 108–9).
58 Bhadra (1985: 258).
59 This section of the essay draws from Sinha (2007b: 213–25).
60 Taylor (1996: 84).
61 Haynes and Prakash (1991: 1–2).
62 Scott (1985: 38).
63 For a detailed discussion, see Sinha (2006).
64 Dalton (1960[1872]: 208).
65 Bodding (198[1925]: 38).
66 Man (1983[1867]: 152).
67 *Witch-craft leads to murder*, Notes from the Singbhum Old Correspondence in Commissioner's Record Room, Ranchi, in Roy Choudhury (1958: 271).
68 H. Ricketts, Report on the District of Singhbhum, 1854, cited in Bhadra (1985: 258–59).
69 *Notes on 'Soka' or Witch finder* (1860), Digest of some letters in Commissioner's Record Room, Ranchi, in Roy Choudhury (1958: 279).
70 Skaria (1997: 135).

71 Skaria (1997: 138).
72 Hardiman (2006: 219).
73 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 88).
74 Roy Chaudhury (1959: 88).
75 Bodding (1994[1942]: 160). The first version of this Santal text was published in 1887 by L.O. Skrefsrud.
76 Bodding (1994[1942]: 160).
77 Bhadra (1985: 259).
78 Skaria (1997: 38).
79 Hardiman (2006: 220).
80 Archer (1984: 482–83).
81 Ball (1985[1885]: 116).
82 Letter from Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Commissioner of Chotanagpur, Vol. VII, Old Correspondence, Singhbhum, 1860, No. 4455, in Roy Chaudhury (1958: 134).
83 I am grateful to Ata Mallick for pointing out these sources.
84 Trial of Mata, Sarda, Rando and Topaey vs. Government and Musammat Rangree; Bengal Judicial Proceedings, Nos 57–58, dated 6 October 1859, WBSA.
85 Trial of Urjoon, Libro and others vs. Government and Musammat Moogee, Bengal Judicial Proceedings, Nos 59–60, 1859, WBSA.
86 Singh (2002: 101).
87 Singh (2002: 212).
88 I have in mind here the way in which Chotanagpur has been described by Bradley-Birt (1903).

3 Remembering Gonoo

The profile of an adivasi rebel of 1857

Sanjukta Das Gupta

On 29 April 1864, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal confirmed the sentence of transportation for life upon 'the prisoner Gonoo' for 'waging war against the Queen in the years 1857 and 1858'.[1] Prior to that, Gonoo had been brought to trial at the court of the Chota Nagpur Commissioner on the charges that:

> … he, during the years 1857 and 1858 to 1859 as the leader of the insurgent Coles in Singbhoom, did wage war against the Queen, thereby committing an offence punishable under the Laws in force at the time and under Section 121 of the Indian Penal Code, and cognizable by this Court.
>
> That on or about the month of February 1858 at Seringsira Ghaut in Singbhoom committed murder by causing the death of a European or person supposed to be a European, name unknown, and thereby committed an offence punishable under the Laws in force at the period … [2]

To these charges, Gonoo had pleaded 'not guilty'. He admitted to having been a follower of Arjun Singh, the former Raja of Porahat,[3] and that he had merely carried out the orders of the latter.[4]

The trial of Gonoo, a minor leader in Singhbhum district, underlines the fact that the Rebellion of 1857 had as significant an impact in the margins of the empire as it had in the Gangetic plains of north India. In recent conferences held in the 150th year of the Rebellion of 1857, there were references to the tribal leader Gonoo and his unsuccessful war against the British in Chota Nagpur between 1857 and 1859. Noted academics held discussions about local uprisings and debated about the ties of fealty that could bind a tribal rebel to the traditional kingship, whereas others saw him as a subaltern hero, who forced the traditional rulers to participate in the upsurge.[5] There was indeed a touch of surrealism in these discussions, as such concerns seemed far removed from the turbulent life and times of the unfortunate Gonoo who lived in a far-off tribal village in Chota Nagpur in a far-off age. Very little is actually known about him. The histories of other nineteenth-century tribal rebels of Chota Nagpur – Sidhu, Kanu, Birsa Munda and Jatra

Bhagat,[6] to name a few – are fairly well documented. But Gonoo is a strangely nebulous figure in comparison with these other, more spectacular leaders. What we know of him is largely restricted to the trial proceedings, which are preserved today in the West Bengal State Archives in Kolkata and have been retrieved and brought to the public forum by the subaltern scholar Gautam Bhadra in his essay on the Rebellion of 1857 in *Subaltern Studies*.[7] There are few other writings on him. Nor are there any pictorial depictions that could give an insight into Gonoo, the man, his compulsions and his understanding of authority and indeed of the Rebellion. This chapter is therefore an attempt to understand the tribal rebel, his world and his worldview.

The Rebellion of 1857 in Singhbhum[8]

To understand Gonoo's story, we may begin with an account of the Rebellion of 1857 in Singhbhum. From the trial proceedings, we know that Gonoo had been a leader of Bar *pir*,[9] a region in Singhbhum located to the south of Porahat, which was the seat of authority of the Raja of Porahat. Bar *pir* had been a traditional stronghold of the Raja prior to the British takeover.

In 1857, Singhbhum was an isolated district in the Chota Nagpur division of the Bengal presidency, inhabited mainly by different adivasi communities of whom the Hos were the most numerous. The news of the uprising in north India was initially carried back to Chota Nagpur by the soldiers of the disbanded Bengal Regiment. In Chota Nagpur, the movement had begun in the last week of July 1857 as a rebellion of the sepoys of the Ramgarh Battalions, a small body of troops at Hazaribagh. From Hazaribagh, it spread to Ranchi. When the news reached Chaibasa, the administrative headquarters of the Kolhan Government Estate, Sissmore, the Senior Assistant Commissioner in charge of the district, fled to Raniganj, leaving the town under the protection of Chakradhar Singh, the ruler of Seraikela. Sissmore had also asked the other ruling families in the region to send in troops to protect Chaibasa. However, the old rivalries and feuds between the different ruling houses, which had been subdued over the preceding years thanks to Pax Britannica, were resurrected. Arjun Singh, the Raja of Porahat bitterly resented the confidence that the British reposed on his arch rival the ruler of Seraikela, and ultimately threw in his lot with the rebel force.

At the beginning of September, the sepoys of Chaibasa, convinced that British rule had come to an end, plundered the treasury and set off for Ranchi to join their fellow mutineers. Rumours spread across the town that British rule had come to an end and that the reign of Arjun Singh was to recommence. Yet, at this stage, the majority of the Hos in the region were opposed to the sepoys.[10] K.S. Singh explains this initial refusal of the Hos to extend support to the sepoys in Chaibasa in terms of their memories of army repression in the Kol insurrection of 1832.[11] At this juncture, Raja Arjun Singh invited the sepoys to join him at Chakradharpur on condition that they handed over to him the greater part of the money taken from the treasury.

And it was through the efforts of the raja that the Hos were drawn into the uprising. Later in the month, when British reinforcements arrived in Chaibasa under Lt Birch, the Hos refused them assistance against the rebel sepoys, stating that they could not attack the rebels, as they had gathered there at the Porahat raja's invitation.

The raja, for his part, attempted to pacify the British by proclaiming his loyalty and asserting that he had taken charge of the Chaibasa treasure with the intention of restoring it to the British at a later date. Nonetheless, despite the raja's protestations of innocence, it would appear that preparations for revolt were well under way. In early September, a proclamation had been made through the bazaar (local market) at Chaibasa 'that everything belongs to God, that the country belonged to the King and that the ruler thereof is Urjoon Sing'.[12] The raja took the opportunity afforded by Sissmore's flight to reassert his authority over the Hos, and he made the Hos swear to pay their revenues to him as he was the legitimate ruler of Singhbhum.[13] In return, the raja promised to reduce their land taxes by half.[14] Threats were also utilised to enlist the support of the Hos. They were warned that seven regiments would revenge them if they injured the mutineers.[15] As a result of such efforts, more than 3,000 Hos attended the Dusshera festival organised by Arjun Singh and paid their respects to him as their 'liege lord', as was customary in Singhbhum.[16] At Chakradharpur, the residence of the raja, and at Ajodhya, one of his villages, several of the traditional adivasi leadership, the *mankis* and *mundas*,[17] were called in, and they swore to be faithful to the raja and not to side either with the British government or with the Raja of Seraikela. In fact, all the Hos south of Porahat as well as the *illaqadars* (tenure holders of the Porahat raja) of Koraikela and Bandgaon supported Arjun Singh. In the official British estimate, nearly a quarter of the Hos had sworn allegiance to Arjun Singh.[18] British military officers reported that the arrow, the signal of insurrection, supposedly from Porahat, had been circulating among the Hos of Kolhan.[19] Blacksmiths were employed to prepare cannon balls for the raja.[20] It is evident, therefore, that the country was in turmoil, and preparations for Rebellion were being made all over Chota Nagpur. There are also indications that different adivasi groups, for instance the Bhuiyas of Koraikela and Chainpur, were engaged in mobilising support for the raja's rebellion.[21] The Porahat raja had also sent his emissaries to Dorunda to seek the help of the sepoys there. At the same time, his agents were sent through Kolhan to persuade the adivasis to offer their allegiance and accept his protection for the purpose.

On 25 September 1857, Arjun Singh was declared a rebel. On 11 October, bowing to British pressure, he proceeded to Ranchi where he handed over the treasure and the rebel sepoys to the government, but failed to secure any benefits for himself. On his return to Chakradharpur, he learnt of the death of his only child. With this and having his property seized, he flung himself whole-heartedly into rebellion.

Therefore, two phases of the Rebellion can be identified from the colonial records. The first was marked by the mutiny of the sepoys of the Ramgarh

Battalions and the involvement of the Raja of Porahat. In the second phase, the Rebellion spread among the tribal people, the Hos, who rallied to the call of the Raja of Porahat. Behind their participation lay the grievances of the people, which arose as a result of the British intrusion in Singhbhum, the imposition of alien governance, particularly that associated with the revenue and the police administration, and the upheavals these had caused in the quotidian life of the tribal people. Undoubtedly, British rule had affected both the traditional power structure and also the village society, and the response of ordinary Ho peasants to the Porahat raja's call for rebellion reflected their grievances against British rule. Once the Ho rebellion started, it tended at times to gather momentum independently of the traditional rajas. Yet the ties of fealty that had once linked the Porahat Raj and the Hos were not broken, and the Ho rebellion was intended to assist the Porahat raja to re-establish his authority in the region. However, it is also evident that a section of the adivasis, particularly some influential *mankis* and *mundas* who had been co-opted within the British administrative structure and had come to depend on British goodwill rather than upon community sanction for retaining their office, ranged themselves firmly on the side of the British. And it was with their help that the British could gather information about the rebels such as Gonoo who waged guerrilla warfare from the densely forested hills.

The Ho rebellion, however, could not persist in the face of repressive government measures. With the help of the rulers of Seraikela and Kharsawan and a troop of 3,000 Hos who had remained loyal, the British succeeded in restoring their rule in Chaibasa. *Mankis* and *mundas*, who remained loyal to the British, gave written agreements to Birch regarding the payment of the revenue with great willingness. Raja Arjun Singh, divested of all his powers and land ownership rights, was forced to flee from Porahat and take shelter in the jungles. The Porahat rebels were quiet for some time, but disturbances continued until early 1859 even after the Rebellion was suppressed. The British feared that, as long as the raja was at large, there was a chance that further disturbances could occur in Singhbhum as 'the influence he possesses is enormous'.[22] However, these sporadic outbursts were soon contained through repressive means by which peace was restored in Kolhan.

Gonoo and his rebellion

The story of Gonoo's rebellion begins when British troops together with Sikh forces attacked Bar *pir* on 14 January 1858. There they were resisted and decimated by rebel Hos, whose leader apparently was Gonoo.

The trial proceedings state that he was the son of Mata, the *munda* of Chenpatia village in Bar *pir.* Although it is not certain, it seems very likely that Gonoo belonged to the *khuntkatti* lineage, i.e. the original village clearing family, as *khuntkattidars* customarily selected headmen from among themselves to ensure their primary control over village resources. British rule had significantly shaped his childhood, for his family had availed itself of the

new opportunities and had sent Gonoo to the Anglo-Hindi school at Chaibasa. The school had been set up in 1841 particularly for the Hos with the intention of eradicating belief in witchcraft through the spread of education. The British administration had recorded the great enthusiasm with which the Hos of the locality responded to the Anglo-Hindi school and reported that the adivasi pupils had built leaf huts in the school compound so that they could live nearby.[23]

According to some witnesses, on leaving the school, Gonoo 'became poor and took to evil ways, thieving and the like'.[24] Other witnesses, loyal to the British, also affirmed that, on growing up, Gonoo had taken to thieving[25] and that he had a bad character like his father who died in jail for rebellion and his brother who was hanged.[26] To the British, therefore, Gonoo was an unsavoury character of ill-repute, 'a notorious leader of the insurgents' and,

> the most active adherent of the ex-Rajah of Porahaut amongst the Singhbhum or Lurka Coles and the principal agent employed in spreading disaffection amongst them and the leader of the men of that tribe who rebelled … [27]

Not only the district administration but the adivasi community as well recognised him as a leader. During his trial, one of his former followers testified that, 'during the disturbances of 1857 and 1858 he was the leader of all the Hos from Colehan who joined the Rajah' and that he was 'the first to give out that the country belonged to the ex-Rajah of Porahaut, and that the people must join and fight for him'.[28] He further attested that Gonoo had collected men to fight for the ex-raja and that he himself had been obliged to join him.[29] Another witness stated that, 'his name was in everybody's mouth',[30] and yet another charged that Gonoo had constituted himself as the 'chief of Singbhoom'.[31]

In the colonial perception, Gonoo was indeed an active leader in the Rebellion, who had been responsible for the murder of at least one European. He had headed a large body of insurgents who had collected at Seringsira ghat and had ordered the killing of a European prisoner.[32] Witnesses confirmed that he had earlier joined the Porahat raja's attack on the British forces at Jayantgarh in southern Kolhan and that some members of the Jayantgarh police were killed at his instigation.[33] Two months later, Gonoo reappeared in the region with a *tal-pat* (palm leaf) letter purportedly of the Raja's and demanded the building up of a force against the British. He had also led the Hos in a fight against the Sikh forces. He and his men also forcibly collected provisions from the villages, a move that was distinctly unpopular. There were complaints that Gonoo and a large number of rebel followers 'filled the village and were in every house demanding food and drink'.[34] Claiming Gonoo to be their leader, the insurgents threatened villagers with dire consequences if their demands were not fulfilled.

Such descriptions have prompted subalternist scholars to interpret Gonoo's rebellion as an instance of subaltern autonomy. Yet how did Gonoo perceive

himself? Rather than an independent leader, he clearly saw himself as a loyal adherent of the raja. Although this was partly said in self-defence at his trial in a bid to thwart punitive reprisals, he undoubtedly considered himself to have been a vassal of the Porahat raja. The ties of loyalty between the Raja of Porahat and the rebel Hos become apparent when we examine the testimony of the rebels. At his trial, Gonoo reaffirmed that he had taken to rebellion at the call of the Porahat raja. The whole country was in revolt, and he had gone to the Porahat raja along with all the *mankis* and *mundas* and expressing their loyalty to him; they had asserted that 'the *sahibs* have run away and you are now our ruler and we will hold with you'.[35] He had further stated,

> … the Rajah called us and said see I have been hunted from Chuckerdhurpore and from Porahaut and am now obliged to live in the jungles. What will you do? Will you fight for me? We said we would fight and swore to do so, then he assembled the Bhuyas and the Dhorrowas and gave their pay and arms, and an army was collected and we went to Ajoodiah with the intention of fighting Chuckerdhur Singh of Seraikellah.[36]

To argue that Gonoo had indeed forced the Porahat raja to take up arms and perform his role as the traditional leader of Singhbhum at a time when British power and authority seemed to have disappeared assumes that Gonoo had a perfect understanding of the political world in which he was situated.[37] To an extent, the Hos were aware of the political vacuum that had appeared in 1857. The Hos rebelled knowing full well that the British had left the country. However, should they have wished for an alternative world, they would have selected one of their own traditional leadership as ruler. Prior to the Rebellion of 1857, the British had increasingly projected the Hos as having been virtually a 'stateless' people, totally isolated from the wider political authority in Singhbhum who had been united through British efforts, a myth that had been perpetuated and popularised by the colonial rulers in an effort to legitimise their authority as the protectors and the guardians of the Hos. Thus, Col. Dalton had stated that old Hos people informed him that, although they were friends and allies of the Singhbhum rulers, they were never their subjects.[38] If this had been true, there would have been no further need to trust the leadership of the district to Arjun Singh, the Raja of Porahat. Arjun Singh had been drawn into the rebellion prior to and for reasons other than those of the Hos. Obviously, Gonoo's willingness to accept the rule of the Porahat raja indicates the existence of older accepted linkages between the raja and his subjects.

Colonial records from the early nineteenth century, which was a period of general unrest and turbulence in Singhbhum, reveal that vestiges of the apparatus of state power was very much in existence in the countryside, even though this may have lost much of its potency over the years. Like the Nagbanshi Raj of neighbouring Chota Nagpur, the state system of the Singhbhum Raj, of which the Porahat raja was the chief constituent, had entrenched itself in the

countryside over time and thus had a well-organised bureaucracy that was chiefly associated with collection of tributes and impositions of various kinds. However, unlike the Nagbanshi Raj, the authority of the Singhbhum royal family had weakened over the years on account of a continuous struggle for power between the different factions of the ruling house, the Rajas of Porahat, Seraikela and Kharsawan, and also because of the challenge from the Mayurbhanj rulers in the southern part of the district. Nevertheless, several ties connected the Hos with the supra village authorities. These linkages were not merely economic in nature, being associated with the revenue-collecting mechanism. Other ties of loyalty and cultural factors also cemented the hold of the state power over the tribal population. These included the *pancha* (land tax) collected from individual villages and sundry other payments associated with religious and social practices. The Porahat raja also claimed military service from the Hos, partly through the ritual status that they had gained and partly through promises of booty.[39] Certain customs, such as the ritual gifting of turbans to Ho *mankis* and *mundas*, further cemented the ties of loyalty between the different Singhbhum rulers and their tribal subjects.[40]

It seems likely that the Porahat raja had formally appointed Gonoo as a subordinate vassal, investing him as a 'Sirdar' through the gift of a turban and a horse.[41] Gonoo's absolute loyalty to the Porahat raja becomes apparent in his steadfast refusal to invoke the ruler of Seraikela as 'raja', an appellation that he reserved for his own liege lord. Thus, it would be erroneous to ascribe to Gonoo a fully autonomous plan of action. Although an important leader, Gonoo's rebellion was instigated by the old royal family of the district with whom the Hos had ties of dependence and loyalty over a long period.

Witch killings in Singhbhum in 1857

In Gonoo's world, therefore, the traditional rulers had an acknowledged place. It was also a world where there was an accepted mode of dealing with the enemies of society, namely witches and wizards. A specific feature of the 1857 Rebellion in Singhbhum was the marked increase in the number of witch killings in the district. Some historians have indeed identified witch-hunts as a mode of resistance, which was less direct, less confrontationist, but with greater community sanction.[42]

To the adivasis, witches, wizards and witchcraft were a significant threat to their social order, affecting their material existence. To British observers, the most abhorrent feature of the Hos religion was their belief in witchcraft. Dalton wrote, 'All disease in men or animals is attributed to one of two causes – the wrath of some evil spirit who has to be appeased, or the spell of some witch or sorcerer who should be destroyed or driven out of the land'.[43] Dalton had found that it was not only women who were accused of having dealings with the evil spirits, as is commonly assumed, but people of the opposite sex were frequently denounced as well.[44] The Hos, in common with

other groups in Chota Nagpur, employed a *sokha* (witchfinder) to divine who had cast the spell. Dalton had found that the people of the Kharia tribe were considered to be the most expert *deonwas* (witch doctors) in Singhbhum, and were therefore held in great awe.[45] Once located, the accused were tortured until they had no alternative but to accept the charge and were often killed by the adivasis with the utmost brutality. Sometimes, 'whole families were … disposed of since it was supposed that witchcraft was hereditary and that it was advisable to scotch the brood'.[46] The *sokha*, however, did not always denounce a fellow being. He sometimes announced that the sickness was caused by the displeasure of the family *bhut* (spirits). In such cases, a propitiatory offering was demanded to appease the spirits, which the master of the house provided. Dalton believed that the *sokha* would usually benefit from such transactions for he ensured that he received the lion's share.[47] However, the violence with which the 'evil' forces were purged indicates the threat perception of such 'deviant' behaviour to the tribal order.

After the annexation of western Singhbhum in 1837, colonial administrators undertook a programme of reform. One of the first targets of the civilising zeal of the new rulers was 'most barbarous murders', the practice of witch-hunting. A hospital was set up, which was specially devoted to the care of the Hos who were believed to be the victims of witchcraft.[48] The relatives of all sick people, whose illness was supposed to be caused by witchcraft, were to be persuaded to take them to a government hospital. Cures from diseases would, it was hoped, overcome the belief in witchcraft. The assistant political agent was instructed to remove the person suspected of practising witchcraft, together with his property, to another village where the same prejudice did not exist against him. Yet another aspect of the reformist measures was education for the Hos. The Anglo-Hindi school (of which the rebel Gonoo had been a pupil) was set up at Chaibasa in order to 'relieve a rising generation of Larka Coles from that gross ignorance', which, according to the British, was responsible for 'much of the foolish and vicious habits of the people and their consequent misery'.[49]

The traditional village leadership, the *mankis* and the *mundas*, were required by the new laws to report all cases of witch killings to the district administration. Yet, in most cases, the village headmen, more often than not, sided with those involved in the killing of witches. To the Hos, the killing of a witch was not murder.[50] Witches or sorcerers had to be driven out of the land in the interests of maintaining communal order within the village. British officers, however, considered that witch-hunting occurred for personal reasons. Ricketts thus argued,

> A Cole who owes another a grudge, has but to give out that he has ascertained the aggressor to be a witch to bring over to his side the *mundas* and *mankis* and when he has slain the so called witch, they will all use their utmost endeavours to shield the murder and conceal the crime.[51]

O'Malley wrote that, during the uprisings of 1857, the Hos made a clean sweep of those who had remained immune under British rule, accusing them of being witches.

While witch-hunting represented a mode of community resistance, as Shashank Sinha argues, available records suggest that personal factors also had a role in the spate of witch killings that occurred during the Rebellion of 1857. Believing that the British had left the country, the adivasis took advantage of the absence of the British to rid themselves of witches, not only because they represented threats to the community as a whole, but also because they harmed their personal interests. The records of the following trial relating to witch-hunting in Singhbhum between 1857 and 1859 brings out certain interesting facts regarding Ho society and their belief system.[52]

The trial related to the killing of a Ho villager named Paraee, his wife and two children, who lived in Bantaria *pir* in Singhbhum, by three fellow villagers named Mata, Sarda and Rando, on suspicion of being a wizard. Mata stated during his cross-examination that,

> Paraee Cole of our village practised sorcery and caused the death of several villagers. He gave mutton to Chukroo, my grandfather, Rando and Ghasee, Chukroo's son. Then the prisoner Tepoey, my uncle, spoke about this to the prisoner Rando, who is Moondah of the village, and he called us three, that is myself and the prisoners Sarda and Rando and settled to kill Paraee.[53]

The instigator Tepoey related a similar story:

> I told Rando and the others to kill Paraee and his wife and then went to Torapai to be out of the way. Paraee was my elder brother, and I am not the first to impute sorcery to him. Six years ago Kanoo Mankee, when dying declared that Paraee haunted him in his dreams, and it was through his sorcery, he Kanoo, was about to die … I said I am no wizard but you can kill my brother who is one.[54]

The trio took advantage of the general disorder and chaotic situation of the mutiny to get rid of witches and wizards when the sahib's law was no longer functional. One of the killers, Sarda, stated that,

> The Sahibs, we had heard, had all left the country … now was the time to get rid of the wizards and witches … there was great confusion, fighting and killing … and we knew that the Sahibs hanged for such work, but we thought there would be no more hanging.[55]

However, the motives of the instigator, who was the brother of the deceased, differed. Topayee confessed that he ordered the killers to kill his brother because his brother was identified as wizard and he knew the villagers would

kill them both. His father too had been killed for practising sorcery.[56] The daughter of the slain Puraee imputed an even more different motivation. She accused the killers of personal enmity and charged that, 'I believe that they killed them, because we were better off than most of others and usually had more grain and better crops than any one else'.[57] Another witness, Kunkooa, who had been hired to burn the bodies, had also stated that the killers had taken all of Paraee's property and that 'all the villagers may have been consenting to the murders'.[58] In other similar cases relating to witch-hunting in Singhbhum, several personal motivations were revealed. In one incident, a witness testified that the wizard who had been identified and killed was not liked by fellow villagers because of his allegiance to the Raja of Singhbhum.[59] In another case, a villager testified that the real reason why a witch named Pillum was killed was that she had trespassed on the paddy fields of the killer.[60]

Such concerns voiced by a section of the adivasis, usually the relatives of the victim, reveal the existence of a critical minority, whose voice was silenced through community sanctions. We need not conclude that all adivasis necessarily acted together in the killing of witches. Although silenced, there was protest against witch-hunting from within the indigenous community itself. Resistance to the practice was not a concern of the colonial government alone. Documents relating to the trial of witch-hunters during the Rebellion of 1857 show that economic motivations or personal enmity often lay behind the massive increase in the incidence of witch-hunting in Chota Nagpur, although large-scale participation in witch-hunting was the outcome of the general fear and dread that witchcraft and sorcery provoked among the people.

Conclusion

The Rebellion of 1857 has been variously studied, with different researches highlighting regional nuances and specificities of the rebellions.[61] This chapter focuses on the nature of adivasi participation and the role of the leadership in the Rebellion in Singhbhum in Chota Nagpur. Most scholars tend to play down the involvement of the Chota Nagpur adivasis in the uprising of 1857. K.S. Singh thus suggests that the Hos, like the Oraons and the Mundas, kept aloof from the 1857 uprising because the movements in Chotanagpur had been led by the oppressive feudal rulers and supported by the Muslims and the Hindus whom the tribals feared and resented.[62] Romila Thapar and Majid Siddiqi also hold a similar point of view and have argued that: 'When the great revolt of 1857–58 shook northern India and dislodged Company rule, the tribal population of Chota Nagpur remained uninvolved in the events'.[63]

Subalternist scholars such as Gautam Bhadra, on the other hand, have depicted the 1857 movement in Singhbhum as an instance of subaltern autonomy under the leadership of the rebel Gonoo, a political rebellion of the Kols involving the entire community.[64] By retrieving Gonoo from the archives, Bhadra undoubtedly highlights an aspect of history that would otherwise have been forgotten. However, by singling out a single episode of

rebellion from the sequence of events that constituted the Rebellion of 1857 in Singhbhum, he has imparted to it a significance and a distinctiveness that is perhaps unwarranted, and has resulted in Gonoo being depicted as an iconic figure of subaltern autonomy. However, as argued in this chapter, contemporary records reveal that the rebellion did meet with widespread support from a major section of the Hos, but their participation resulted largely from the instigation of their traditional ruler, the Raja of Porahat, who had been divested of all authority over them when Kolhan was annexed by the British. Thus, it would be erroneous to ascribe to Gonoo and to the rebel Hos a fully autonomous plan of action. Gonoo did not operate within a disparate and autonomous domain; there were several linkages between the elite ruling class and their erstwhile tribal subjects. It is significant that the Rebellion of 1857, which occurred 20 years after the British annexation of Singhbhum, brought the tribal people and the erstwhile ruling groups together in a united act of defiance against foreign governance. This, in fact, served to reverse the trend of the previous century of tribal opposition to the growing exactions and oppressions of the ruling classes.

At the same time, it has to be asserted that there were many among the Hos who remained loyal to the British and that it was with their assistance that the Rebellion could be quelled. A section of influential *mankis* and *mundas* ranged themselves firmly on the side of the British. For instance, Moora Manki of Kursajori, who had been given a letter by the rebels,[65] questioning whether he intended to go to war on the side of the Sahib Bahadur, decided to hand it over to the British government. He did this on the advice of Deroo Manki, who was the head of all the *mankis* in the region. He stated that, 'The Sahibs have given us no cause of dissatisfaction. All respect them. We will and still do regard them. We will act according to the orders of the sahibs and never disobey them'.[66] Similarly, Dabroo Manki, whom the British considered to be a man 'of trust and reputation', informed the authorities that the arrow of war was circulating in Kolhan.[67] Dabroo Manki had in fact become alienated from the Hos of his village because of his loyalty to the British. The latter had gone over to the side of the raja in defiance of the Manki.[68] Indeed, Gonoo himself was apprehended thanks to the information provided by the adivasis themselves. A Santal named Ramu informed the deputy commissioner of Gonoo's whereabouts, and he was finally arrested with the help of the villagers of Goodie where he had taken refuge.[69] Interestingly, Ramu also mentions the other adivasi leaders of the 1857 Rebellion named Raghu and Shamkurran. This points to the existence of several local leaders about whom we know hardly anything even today.

Gonoo himself is an unknown figure in Singhbhum today. Most people in the locality seem to be unaware of his existence as an adivasi rebel leader, although Sidhu, Kanu and Birsa Munda are household names. Local historians do not mention Gonoo in their writings. He is absent from the works of both Puroshottam Kumar who wrote about the Rebellion of 1857 in Chota Nagpur[70] and Murali Sahu[71] who wrote about the impact of British rule in

Kolhan. He finds mention in Mathew Areeparampil's interpretation of the rising of 1857 in Jharkhand,[72] but Areeparampil does not add significantly to Gautam Bhadra's account. Further research with a special stress on the oral history of the region is required for more information on Gonoo and other local leaders of the Rebellion of 1857.

Notes

1 Geoghegan to Chota Nagpur Commissioner, 29 April 1864, Government of Bengal (henceforth GOB), Judicial Proceedings, No. 32, May 1864, West Bengal State Archives (henceforth WBSA).
2 E.T. Dalton, Commissioner of Chota Nagpore, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31, May 1864, WBSA.
3 The Porahat Raj constituted the chief ruling family in Singhbhum. Earlier designated as the Singhbhum Raj, it was weakened and reduced in authority due to challenges from the younger branches of the family, namely Seraikela and Kharsawan.
4 Examination of Gonoo, 8 March 1862, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 32, May 1864, WBSA.
5 See for instance, Bhattacharya (2007: ix–xl).
6 Sidhu and Kanu were the famous leaders of the Santal *hul* of 1855, Birsa Munda, the charismatic leader of the Munda *ulgulan* in the 1890s, while Jatra Bhagat was one of the Oraon leaders of the Tana Bhagat movement of the early twentieth century.
7 Bhadra (1985).
8 A part of the Chota Nagpur division of the Bengal presidency until 1911, Singhbhum today falls in the newly created state of Jharkhand, i.e. erstwhile South Bihar. It lies between 22° and 23° N latitude and 86° 53′ and 85° 2′ E longitude and forms an important part of the lower plateau of Chota Nagpur.
9 A *pir* was a traditional administrative subdivision among the adivasi regions in Singhbhum. It usually consisted of ten to twelve contiguous villages; however, some of the larger *pirs* had as many as 120 villages.
10 Some 300–400 Hos from Ajodhya *pir*, who were loyal to the Raja, were among the Hos who had assembled at the River Sanjay, and they attempted to prevent the sepoys from making off with the Chaibasa treasure (O'Malley 1910: 38).
11 Singh (1998: 81).
12 E. Lushington to the Secretary to GOB, 29 December 1857, para. 9, Home Public Consultations, No. 38 of 29 January 1858, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI).
13 Izahar of Ruggo Chupprassie, 7 September 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 136 A of 12 November 1857, WBSA.
14 From the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom to the Secretary to GOB, 3 October 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 341, 22 October 1857, para. 10, WBSA.
15 From the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom to the Secretary to GOB, 3 October 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 341, 22 October 1857, para. 10, WBSA.
16 From the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom to the Secretary to GOB, 3 October 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 341, 22 October 1857, para. 12, WBSA.
17 The *mundas* were the village headmen, whereas the *mankis* were the heads of a cluster of villages.
18 From the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom to the Secretary to GOB, 3 October 1857, para. 11.

19 From the Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom to the Secretary to GOB, 3 October 1857, para. 5.
20 Datta (1957: 70).
21 A loyalist *manki*, who deposed before Captain Birch, stated that he had been approached by the Bhuiyas to rebel against the 'Saheb Bahadur', Senior Assistant Commissioner of Singbhoom, 22 September 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 136 A of 12 November 1857, WBSA.
22 Dalton to Young, 8 November 1858, para. 8, Home Public Consultations, No. 8 of 26 November 1858, NAI.
23 Roy Chaudhury (1958: 165).
24 Deposition of Martum, *manki* of Mouzah Deoposee, District Singhbhum, March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
25 Deposition of Rainso, 7 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
26 Deposition of Konka of Mouzah Koslapose, 7 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
27 Remarks of E.T. Dalton, the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, 9 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
28 Deposition of Rainso, 7 March 1864.
29 Deposition of Rainso, 7 March 1864.
30 Deposition of Konka, 7 March 1864.
31 Deposition of Soma of Mouza Nagtee, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
32 Remarks of E.T. Dalton, the Commissioner of Chota Nagpur, 9 March 1864. However, in his own defence, Gonoo admitted being present when the European was murdered, but asserted that one Gopi Mohapatra had ordered it and carried out the execution.
33 Deposition of Konka, 7 March 1864.
34 Deposition of Chamroo, 8 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
35 Examination of Gonoo, 8 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
36 Examination of Gonoo, 8 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
37 See Bhadra (1985: 260).
38 Dalton (1960[1872]).
39 In fact, the Hos were well known in the region as Larka Kols or the warrior Kols.
40 Macpherson (1908: 78–79).
41 Deposition of Rainso, 7 March 1864.
42 Sinha (2007b: 1672–75).
43 Dalton (1960[1872]: 208).
44 Dalton (1960[1872]: 208).
45 Dalton (1960[1872]: 209).
46 Ball (1880: 115).
47 Dalton (1960[1872]: 209).
48 Judicial Department General Letters to the Court of Directors, GOB, Vol. 19, No. 8 of 1838, 1 March 1838, para. 4, WBSA.
49 Mangles to Wilkinson, 6 June 1837, para. 5, GOB, Judicial Criminal Proceedings, No. 28, 6 June 1837, WBSA.
50 O'Malley (1910: 192).
51 Ricketts (1854: 91).
52 I am grateful to my student Ata Mallick for drawing my attention to these records.
53 Examination of Mata of Bynteria *Peer*, 6 August 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.

54 Examination of Tepoey of Bynteria *Peer*, 6 August 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.
55 Examination of Sarda, 6 August 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.
56 Confession of Tepoey, 15 July 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.
57 Deposition of Rungaee, daughter of Paraee, 15 July 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.
58 Deposition of Kunkooa, 15 July 1859, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 58, 6 October 1859, WBSA.
59 GOB, Judicial Proceedings No. 24, 3 November 1859, WBSA.
60 GOB, Judicial Proceedings No. 30–32, 3 November 1859, WBSA.
61 The rebellions of 1857 have thus been variously interpreted as a feudal counter-revolution (Sen 1957), 'the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism of the medieval age' (Majumdar 1957: 58), a multi-layered political action, both a mutiny and a rebellion of the people (Chaudhuri 1957), a post-pacification revolt where the mass of the people played little part or followed the behest of the caste superiors (Stokes 1978).
62 Singh (1998: 81).
63 They argue that the main reason for this was the absence among tribal people of links that would make them regard the rebellious *zamindars* as their natural leaders. The Oudh and Bihar peasantries had rallied behind their *taluqdars* and *zamindars* because of ties of kin and clan. The Chota Nagpur situation was entirely different. See Thapar and Siddiqi (2003: 50).
64 Bhadra (1985: 256–63).
65 What is interesting is that the letter was not from the Hos but from another tribal community in the region, namely the Bhuiyas of Koraikela and Chainpur, which indicates that discontent with British rule was widespread among the different communities in Singhbhum.
66 Izahar of Moora *manki*, 22 September 1857, GOB, Judicial Proceedings No. 136 A of 12 November 1857, WBSA.
67 E. Lushington to the Secretary to GOB, 29 December 1857, para. 15, Home Public Consultations, No. 38 of 29 January 1858, NAI.
68 R.C. Birch to A.R. Young, No. 11, 23 November 1857, para. 10, Home Public Consultations, No. 147 of 8 January 1858, NAI.
69 Deposition of Ramu Sonthal, 8 March 1864, GOB, Judicial Proceedings, No. 31 of May 1864, WBSA.
70 Kumar (1991).
71 Sahu (1985).
72 Areeparampil (2002: 170–74).

4 Beyond colonial mapping

Common people, fuzzy boundaries and the Rebellion of 1857

Biswamoy Pati

The 1857 Rebellion alarmed the British in an unprecedented manner. The colonialist was not able to grasp the nature of anti-colonial anger and woke up to counter what was undoubtedly the most widespread military challenge faced by imperialism in the nineteenth century. As for the permanently settled tracts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, we are told of 'disturbances' in Bihar, but relatively little about neighbouring Orissa – even though the 1857 Rebellion altered the situation there as well.

Stung by the 1857 Rebellion, the colonial establishment responded to meet the challenge in several ways. A major part of this process involved the counter-insurgency operations about which scholars working on the 1857 Rebellion tell us.[1] However, what is normally not taken into account is the manner in which these operations incorporated aspects of ideological warfare to counter the Rebellion. These ranged from invoking racist myths to inventing a 'history' and 'geography' of 1857 that seem to have transcended the barrier of time.[2] The 'mutiny' theme dominated what accurately can be termed imperialist historiography – a characterisation that is repeated, maybe unconsciously, even today.[3] Alongside, the effort was to focus narrowly and exclusively on 1857–58. This meant erasing the 'pasts' and the 'futures' of this phase. For instance, it meant obliterating the possibilities of seeing 1857 holistically as the culmination point of colonial loot and plunder (over the early part of the nineteenth century). In addition, it also ignored the way in which the Great Rebellion 'survived' and influenced anti-colonial protest in the period after this phase.

However, can one afford to ignore the connections between 1857 and the peasant/tribal revolts of the preceding phase? Or those uprisings/rebellions that occurred outside the northern region of India? One can refer here to the rebellions of the Bhills in 1852 (in Khandesh, Dhar and Malwa), the Santals in 1855–56 (in Rajmahal, Bhagalpur and Birbhum), the Mapillas over the 1836–54 period in Malabar, the Kandhas in Ghumsar and Baudh (1855–60), the Savaras of Parliakhemedi (1856–57). Or, for that matter, one can cite the Indigo Revolt in Bengal (which began in 1859 and was directed against white planters)[4] – despite being told repeatedly about the role of the Permanent Settlement and the bhadraloks (the English-educated Bengali middle class) who supposedly left Bengal as a 'zone of peace' in this phase.

Another aspect involved inventing geographical boundaries that virtually mapped the 1857 Rebellion and involved a strategy to 'contain' it. This feature is illustrated in the way the Rebellion is mapped to show its 'presence' as largely confined to northern India. The influence of colonial mapping is a feature that is noticeable, perhaps in an indirect manner, in the writings of 'subaltern' historians as well. Here, I have Ranajit Guha in mind. Thus, Guha refers to the 'territoriality' component related to peasant insurgency in the nineteenth century, which saw peasants remaining confined to their local boundaries. In fact, he applies this abstract, highly elitist model to the 1857 Rebellion.[5] However, not only was the real world of the peasant and the tribal different, but scholars such as Tapti Roy provide empirical examples to show how peasants in the Bundelkhand region not only moved to urban centres but also welcomed rebels from outside their immediate areas as their leaders.[6] This feature is also applicable to the *adibasi* (tribal) tracts and, in fact, K.S. Singh refers to the unity of the tribals and non-tribals.[7]

It is this aspect related to the common people and the way they related to territorial boundaries that this chapter examines. It focuses on the artificiality and fluidity of 'boundaries' when it comes to areas such as Chotanagpur, Mayurbhanj and large parts of western Orissa in the mid-nineteenth century. Further, this chapter explores the way in which the common people in the margins transcended geographical barriers and fought against their powerful colonial adversaries. It takes into account the shifts and changes that marked the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa.

The background

Conventional historiography hardly says anything about the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa. This is but the logical corollary of a context where selectivity – shared by both colonial and nationalist historiography – has blurred vital aspects of the past. Thus, this selective 'mapping' excludes Orissa because it is not located as part of north or central India. What we are normally told about relates to 'palace politics' and the attempts of Surendra Sahai (who was a member of the ruling family of Sambalpur) to restore his 'lost' power during the 1857 Rebellion. While imperialist historiography provides the basis of this argument, nationalist historiography – fuelled by chauvinistic upper caste/class 'Oriya' memory – has sustained it by exclusively focusing on Sahai and 'palace intrigues', and wiping out everything else.[8] Thus, any attempt to bring back to history the *adibasis*, outcastes and the marginal sections and visibilise them by highlighting the way in which the advent of colonialism affected their lives, exploring the following of Sahai or examining the broader links of the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa can provide fascinating alternative possibilities.

It would be impossible to focus on the phase of turbulence associated with the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa without keeping in mind the colonisation of the region and the way it affected the common people. It was not new for the tribals and outcastes of the region to be driven systematically into the hilly

and forested interior, but the conquest of Orissa and the formal entry of colonialism (post-1803–4) intensified this pressure considerably. The process of consolidating the power of the landed sections was reinforced through the agrarian settlements and certain allied interventions. These aimed to stabilise colonial rule in the region and co-existed with efforts to tap its resources.[9]

The initial dislocations, shifts and changes saw a host of rebellions. These included the risings in Parliakhemedi (1799–1814), Khurda (rebellion in 1817 by Paikas or feudal military retainers), Ghumsar (1835–36), Angul (1846–47), the rebellion at Kalahandi by Kandhas (tribals) in 1855 and the Sabara (tribals) rebellion (at Parliakhemedi, 1856–57). Many of these were led by the propertied sections whose position was undermined by the colonial interventions. At the same time, this generalisation cannot be pushed beyond a certain point. Thus, in 1856, Udita Pratap Deo (the chief of Kalahandi) in fact suggested to A.H. Macneill (who was in charge of the Hill tracts) to make a 'severe example' to the Kandhas for attacking the latter's camp.[10] This perhaps illustrates the way in which a section of the internally affluent classes was incorporated by and stood behind colonialism as beneficiaries involved in the process of surplus extraction and the exploitation of the peasants and tribals. The latter were angered by the disruptions and dislocations caused by the colonial agrarian settlement, which had seriously interfered with their lives and undermined their existence.

Historians normally forget to mention the colonial terror strikes faced by the tribals and outcastes in the western interior right up to the 1850s. The 'burden of civilising' the tribes, for example, led to stereotyping the Kandhas as 'violent' and 'barbaric' people, who carried out human sacrifice.[11] Although the power of colonialist historiography has haunted generations of historians to accept this position unquestioningly,[12] present-day social anthropologists question the very existence of any such practice.[13] Nevertheless, this rationalised the terror campaigns carried out in the hills of Orissa that led to desertions by the people and were accompanied by the plundering and burning of grain. These drove the tribals and outcastes into the hilly interior.[14] The amount of dislocation these 'campaigns' caused is not easy to assess or quantify. Nevertheless, references to 'deserted villages', 'ruined tanks', 'abandoned agricultural lands' and the 'burning of grain' of the tribal folk bear testimony to the terror campaigns unleashed on marginal people in the course of the 'civilising mission'.[15]

It was this context that had created anger among the common people and had made them rise against their adversaries. We hear of the legendary Chakara Bisoi, who seems to have been 'everywhere' at the 'same time' – including in the colonial records – 'creating trouble'. If mapped in a scientific and rational manner, his area of operation included a huge tract of western Orissa. Interestingly, his name came to symbolise the diverse rebellions from the 1830s, right up to 1856, after which he seems to have faded away.[16]

If seen against this background, the 1857 Rebellion appears to be the culmination of a set of processes that can be traced to the colonisation of the

region. Coming more specifically to the Rebellion of 1857 in Orissa, the movement of Surendra Sahai is rather well known. However, some features that are generally ignored need to be highlighted. Sambalpur came under British control from the Marathas in 1817, and was finally taken over by a treaty in 1826. We are told about the inhabitants of Sambalpur appealing to Major Roughsedge, who was in command of the troops at Hazaribagh, to help out in expelling the Marathas from the state. Interestingly, the retreating Maratha garrison was fearful of attacks from the infuriated peasants. This meant working out an understanding with the British, according to which the Maratha troops were escorted out of the borders of the state (viz. Sambalpur).[17]

The taking over of Sambalpur paved the way for British interference in the state. After trying out various methods, including administering Sambalpur directly for a year (1818–19), the British made Maharaj Sahai the Raja in 1820. When Maharaj Sahai died in 1827, his widowed Rani was allowed to succeed. Surendra Sahai, who claimed chieftainship as the descendant of Madhukar Sahai, the fourth chief of Sambalpur, was deprived of succeeding to the throne.[18]

This created a host of 'disturbances' that linked 'palace politics' with the world of the tribals. Thus, the Gond and the Binjhal tribals, including their *zamindars* (land owners), were unhappy because they were losing their land to Hindu settlers. Although this process had pre-colonial origins, it was reinforced considerably with the colonisation of the region and was, in fact, encouraged by the Rani. Surendra Sahai had the backing of the Gonds and the Binjhals. This led to a series of rebellions carried out in the form of guerrilla warfare in the hill tracts. Villages close to Sambalpur were 'raided' by the rebels. Lieutenant Higgins with a body from the Ramgarh Battalion (stationed in the fort) fought and drove off the insurgents. Matters became serious, and a military force had to be marched from Hazaribagh to counter the rebels. The British intervened through Captain Wilkinson by hanging some of the leaders, deposing the Rani and replacing her with Narayan Singh in 1833.[19]

The Gonds rebelled again under the leadership of Balabhadra Deo, a Gond *zamindar* from Lakhanpur. As the rebels based themselves in the Barapahar hills, they could hide in the forests and hold on for quite some time. The large-scale popularity of the rebellion is visible, especially if we consider that the killing of Balabhadra and the smashing of the stronghold of the rebellion during the counter-insurgency operations could not dampen it. In fact, the rebellion seems to have become stronger in 1839.[20]

We are told that, in 1840, Sahai, his brother Udwant Sahai and uncle Balaram Singh murdered the son and father of Darayo Singh, the *zamindar* of Rampur. They were arrested and sent off to Hazaribagh jail to serve life sentences. Narayan Singh died in 1849, after which one witnesses the direct involvement of the Company in Sambalpur. As he had no male successor, Sambalpur was 'swallowed up' under the provisions of Dalhousie's 'doctrine of lapse'.[21] The civil administration of Sambalpur passed on to the political agent of the Chotanagpur Agency; Sambalpur became the fifth district of the Agency.[22]

The initial policies adopted by the British involved systematic increase in the land revenue demands through two settlements in 1849 and 1854. Thus, the 1849 Settlement increased the revenue demand by a quarter without taking into account the financial capabilities of the villages and struck off privileged tenures, including religious grants. Those who held rent-free villages were assessed at half rates, without any consideration with regard to the time for which the grant had been held. The 1854 Settlement further raised the revenue demands.[23] This created a great deal of dissatisfaction and anger among a large section of the people – including powerful *zamindars* such as the chief of Kolabira or Jaipur – which exploded during 1857.[24]

The beginnings of the Rebellion can be traced to deep anxiety that gripped the colonial administration, which was perhaps reinforced by rumours that were reported. After all, this was in a context when the news reached the colonial administration in Cuttack that the Hazaribagh prisoners who had broken out of jail had joined the Rebellion. Based on the reports that a section of the prisoners had marched towards Sambalpur, we get references to rumours in September 1857 that they had been spotted on the Cuttack–Ungool road. Efforts were made by the colonial administration to recruit additional men to guard the Balasore district jail.

Perhaps the first reference to the Rebellion in Orissa is from the Cuttack division. This relates to the colonial administration arresting Khundnaik and another person 'for conspiring to rebel', and sentencing them to five years of rigorous imprisonment. The initial fall-out of 1857 did touch the sepoys. Thus, in December 1857, one subahdar, two havildars and one naik from the Oriya Paik Company were dismissed for 'insubordination' and attempts to 'incite discontent and insubordination among the troops'.[25] After this, the site of the 1857 Rebellion shifted to western Orissa. And, as will be seen, this shift assumed significance as it altered the very nature of the 1857 Rebellion.

The rebellion in the hills: Sambalpur

The broader linkages between western Orissa, especially Sambalpur, and the Chotanagpur region need to be reiterated because they have serious implications for the 1857 Rebellion in western Orissa. As already discussed, this included the appeals made by some people from Sambalpur to the British (Major Roughsedge) in Hazaribagh to expel the Marathas from Sambalpur, and the British complying in 1817; the marching of troops from Hazaribagh to counter a rebellion (1839); the administration of Sambalpur by the political agent, based in Chotanagpur (after 1849); and the fact that Surendra Sahai, his brother and uncle were housed in the Hazaribagh jail serving life sentences from 1840. Consequently, there was already the basis for some sort of an association between Chotanagpur, Sambalpur and western Orissa. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the developments during 1857 saw significant new dimensions that drew upon and reinforced these existing links.

The news of the rising of the sepoys at Dinapore seems to have reached Hazaribagh towards the end of July 1857. The Hazaribagh detachment rebelled against the British. Soon after this, the treasury was plundered, the jail broken open and the prisoners released. Among these prisoners were Surendra Sahai and his brother Udwant Sahai. The rebels seem to have been divided about their plan of action in Burmu. Some of the Hazaribagh sepoys marched towards Palamau to meet Kuer Singh and their parent body – the Dinapore army. Surendra Sahai decided to march to Sambalpur. The colonial administration viewed this seriously especially in view of Sambalpur's strategic location in the *dak* (postal) network between Bombay and Calcutta and the location of the treasury at Sambalpur. Besides, there was some anxiety about the 'loyalty' of the Ramgarh Battalion, of which about 162 sepoys were posted at Sambalpur. Their 'fidelity', it was believed in official circles, depended on the 'loyalty' of the troops at Dinapore. Consequently, efforts were made to fetch reinforcements from Cuttack and Raipur.[26]

The contingent of 'mutineers' led by Surendra Sahai advanced towards Sambalpur amid rumours of 'insurrectionary' movements. When the Sahai brothers entered the district of Sambalpur, they were joined by a large number of supporters. In fact, they entered the town of Sambalpur in the middle of September with a force of about 1,400–1,600 men and camped close to the old fort. Interestingly, according to official sources, Sahai met the assistant commissioner and assured him that he had no intention of taking over the raj. His only request was to cancel the remaining prison sentences pertaining to both him and his brother. Captain Leigh, the senior assistant commissioner, seems to have wanted to buy time, as the colonial administration at Cuttack had been approached to send reinforcements. Sahai was told that his request would be communicated to the government. Surendra Sahai promised to disperse his followers and remain at Sambalpur, whereas Udwant chose to reside in Khinda, a village close by.[27]

Most probably, the news of the reinforcements being moved to the area reached the rebels. This explains why Surendra Sahai left Sambalpur on 31 October 1857 and joined Udwant at Khinda, where about 1,400 men had gathered. The reinforcements comprising two companies of the 40th Madras Native Infantry along with fifty men of the Orissa Paik Company, led by Captain Knocker, marched to Sambalpur. He was joined by Lieutenant Hadow (of the Madras Artillery) who had some light mountain guns with him. Together, Captain Knocker and Lieutenant Hadow launched an offensive against the rebel strongholds of Khinda and Kolabira. Failing to capture the Sahai brothers, the colonial force destroyed the house of a *goantia* (revenue farmer). It was soon discovered that a large number of rebels had retreated to the jungles, and Jharghati was only one such hideout of a large number of armed men.[28]

What one witnesses after this was large-scale guerrilla warfare. Many of the rebel *zamindars* collected *paikas* (a fighting force, composed of erstwhile retainers) to fight the colonial forces. The tribal folk fought against the colonial forces quite effectively. In fact, as admitted,

> the whole country in the neighbourhood was temporarily in the hands of the insurgents, who were posted in strength at a distance of not more than 3–4 miles from the station [viz. Sambalpur], and nightly fired on our pickets.[29]

As described in November 1857: 'At present the insurgents seem to be a rabble easily dispersed, but who as easily re-assemble [and] unless speedily put down, the insurrection is not unlikely to spread'. In fact, the fears of this rebellion attracting rebels from distant parts to join in proved to be correct.[30]

This was followed by the guerrilla strikes that were launched by the rebels, which proved to be very successful. Thus, they attacked a British contingent in the early hours of 17 November and killed Dr Moore of the Madras Army, who was on his way with Hanson (medical officer, Ganjam) to provide medical aid to the troops at Sambalpur. Both of them were being escorted by twenty *sebundis* (local recruits formed by the Company to counter the Rebellion). According to Hanson, both he and Dr Moore reached Joojoomora (twenty miles from Sambalpur) on the evening of 16 November. The next morning, Hanson resumed his march; Dr Moore and his men were to follow him. When Hanson and his men were about two or three miles away from Joojoomora, his *palki* (palanquin) was attacked. The *palki* bearers threw down the *palki* and ran away. His attempt to command his men to fight proved futile. Hanson heard the rebels shout *pakro maro feringhee banchot* (catch and kill the English bastard), as he managed to escape into the jungle. From the cover of the trees, he saw the rebels 'rifling the *palki*, when their commander asked them to desist'. Hanson managed to escape by hiding until night fall. He wandered in the forests without food in a 'disturbed state' until he was rescued by a group of *sebundis* who were men from the Khondmals.

On hearing that Hanson had been attacked by rebels, Dr Moore seems to have decided 'to get at the rebels', in spite of being advised against it. Most probably, he had not anticipated that he could be a target of the rebels in broad daylight. In fact, he did repulse an attack of two rebels with a revolver and a sword. However, very soon, he was surrounded by about forty men who called out to the bearers to 'separate themselves' from their 'master', after which they killed Dr Moore.

Interestingly, the selectivity of the rebels needs to be noted. Thus, the two *sowars* (sepoys) who had been captured during the raid on Hanson were released without injury (on 19 November) and they returned to Sambalpur. They were deprived of their 'horses, arms, accoutrements and baggage'. Similarly, the *palki* bearers of Dr Moore were clearly asked to separate before he was killed.[31]

Part of this plan to send reinforcements to Sambalpur saw Captain Leigh (senior assistant commissioner, Sambalpur) march with a considerable number of Madras troops (of the 40th Madras Native Infantry) to help the *sebundis*. As reported, while passing through a *ghat* (mountain pass) with dense forests on both sides, he was suddenly fired upon by the rebels, in what was undoubtedly

a major guerrilla strike. Although the Madras sepoys fired upon the rebels, the retaliation by the colonial force proved to be rather ineffective. Thus, three sepoys were killed, and three others and five camp-followers were 'severely injured'.

Colonial power seems to have been thrown out of gear in the tract. In fact, we are told of 'bodies of men' committing excesses in different parts of the district. At the same time, the traffic and postal communication link with Cuttack was left 'suspended'. Besides, a serious effort seems to have been made to prevent the movement of colonial forces by blocking roads with branches of trees.[32] The rebels obstructed the *dak* road to Bombay and burnt down two *dak* stations to cripple the communication links of the enemy. We are told about several armed encounters with the rebels, who were protected by the forests and the hills.[33] In this context, the colonial administration was forced to ask for reinforcements from Madras and Nagpur between December 1857 and January 1858.

On 30 December 1857, Captain Wood led a contingent, which included 73 of his own cavalry, 150 of the Madras Native Army and 50 of the Ramgarh Battalion, to attack the rebels. This offensive proved to be ineffective, even though three rebels and Chhailo Sahai – Surendra Sahai's brother – were killed. Wood was wounded by an arrow. The anxiety caused by the rebels is indicated by the terror struck through the destruction of villages and the hanging of people suspected of being sympathetic to the rebels. There are references to the organisation of 'sorties' to fight the rebel forces.[34] Ironically, the counter-insurgency operations further alienated the tribals and outcastes from the colonial order.

This was followed by a spell of military operations directed against the rebels. Major Bates led an attack against the rebel stronghold at Jharghati pass and seized arms and ammunition and destroyed Kolabira village which was a rebel stronghold. Some people, including a *goantia* and thirteen influential men, surrendered, and the *goantia* was hanged. However, Captain Leigh's efforts to fight the rebels proved to be a failure as he encountered more than 1,500 of them on a hill. The rebels were protected by the thick jungles and stone barricades, and Leigh had to retreat.[35] The rebels struck on 12 February 1858 in a gorge in the Paklikole area, when they killed Captain Woodbridge who was marching to face them at Paharsirgira. Two sepoys accompanying him were killed and five others were injured, while the others got into a panic and fled. It took two days and a 'revenge action' by the colonial army under Ensign Warlow to drive out the rebels from Annapoora and Paklikole and recover Woodbridge's dead body.[36] A three-pronged attack on the rebels by the colonial forces at Kulunda *ghat* (hilly terrain) in December 1859 failed to capture Sahai. At the same time, some rumours circulating during the Rebellion reflected efforts by the rebels to demoralise and divert the attention of their adversaries. According to one such rumour, the Raja of Bamra was made a prisoner by Sahai and his men when he had gone to meet one of his *zamindars*.[37]

In desperation, the British announced a reward of 1,000 rupees for capturing Surendra Sahai.[38] Some of the chiefs who had remained 'loyal' to the British, such as the rajas (princes) of Bamra, Baud, Kalahandi, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Rairakhol, Sareikalla and Sonepur, the propertied sections (viz. the *zamindars* of Sambalpur and of Borasambar) and upper castes such as the Brahmins, were rewarded. Besides, the efforts to counter the Rebellion also included getting together and warning the chiefs and *zamindars* to ensure that the rebels did not get any supplies and help in their territories, and capturing and confiscating the estates of 'insurgent *zamindars*'.[39] Alongside, a series of attacks were launched to 'hunt down' the rebels, during which a conscious policy was formulated to seize their provisions. Besides requisitioning a sizeable number of troops for the purpose, the British were provided with help in the form of contingents of local rajas, who were 'anxious' and willing to support the 'restoration of peace and order'. Thus, the Rajas of Bamra and Rairakhol together provided 300 match-lock men along with another strong division of 1,200 men. They personally led these men to fight the rebels in the passes of the Bara Pahara Hills, where the rebels were supposed to be hiding.[40] Similarly, Chakradhur Singh, the Raja of Sareikalla, provided 'valuable services',[41] while the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj gave the only elephant he had without taking any money for hiring it.[42]

Colonial intelligence reports rarely sketch any specific details related to the rebels, which is perhaps a reflection of their popularity which resulted in the lack of any co-operation received by the counter-insurgency operations. However, we have only one reference to Surendra Sahai and a group of rebels from a report in1859. It seems that Sahai was accompanied by about 100 people and this included women and forty 'sepoy mutineers … supposed to be' of the 'Ramghur Battalion'.[43] This perhaps offers some insight into the social origins of the people associated with the Rebellion in the hills of western Orissa. Similarly, it is almost impossible to obtain sources related to the actual social composition of those who participated in the Rebellion in the hill tracts of Sambalpur. I could trace just one file that perhaps throws some light on the subject, and the Table 4.1[44] draws upon this source.

Although one cannot generalise beyond a point, the details cited in Table 4.1 provide some clues about the social origins of the rebels in the Sambalpur tract. Thus, there seems to be a predominance of tribal participants, which is also explained by the presence of women (along with some Ramgurh sepoys) with Surendra Sahai, mentioned earlier. It also included the fisher folk (viz. Keotas) and milkmen (viz. Gwalas), along with upper castes such as Rajputs. In fact, if seen along with the phenomenon of the 'rajputisation' of tribes in the context of colonial Orissa, one can perhaps see the *adibasi* social origins of the Rajput participants.[45] One can perhaps also grasp the way in which sections of the ruling classes, such as the Rani of Sohunpur, tried to settle old scores with some tenants who troubled them. What is also interesting is that many people were arrested and released later on as there was no proof available to justify the charges against them, which perhaps indicates the way the counter-insurgency operations responded to a serious crisis that had made

Table 4.1 General statement of cases tried under Act XVI of 1857 in the district of Cuttack and Sambalpur division from 14 January to 15 February 1858

	Date	*Name of person*	*Offence charged*	*Sentence*
Cuttack	–	–	–	–
Sambalpur	28 Jan.	Beekram and Ghasee with 41 others	Arrested on charge of rebellion	Released (absence of any proof)
	30 Jan.	Judoo	Abetting rebellion (this case was reported by the Rani of Sohunpur – no ground to convict him)	-do-
		Urjoon	-do-	-do-
	11 Feb.	Runsah Bykount Bundhoo Jhunkur Purdesee Kusoo Munbodh		
		Neero Mahar	Arrested on charge of rebellion (no proof of any criminal act obtained)	Released
	12 Feb.	Gunga Gwala Laxman Rajput Gunoo Rajput		
		Diloo Naik	-do-	Two years with labour and iron
		Kundroo Jhakar Sunnasee Munnodhar Damodar Keoto Deenabandhoo		
		Jhoroo	-do-	Required to furnish recognisance for good conduct in future
	3 Feb.	Chyta Harroo Kisno Panoo Koeroo		
		Samokora	-do-	Released
	6 Feb.	Khada	-do-	-do-
	9 Feb.	Bissoee Mussalchee		
		Seetaram	-do-	-do-
	11 Feb.	Mudhoo Sahoo	-do-	-do-

Note: These cases were inadvertently omitted from previous statements, commissioner, Camp, Sambalpur; dated 11 March 1858.

colonial power almost irrelevant in the hills of western Orissa. In fact, the involvement of tribals along with the sepoys perhaps explains the success of the guerrilla strikes launched by the rebels and why the rebellion survived in the hills, even after being targeted by major colonial offensives.

We also get some insight into colonial insecurities if one bears in mind that the rebel prisoners were transferred out of this tract to Cuttack, nearly 200

miles away. Nearly forty of these prisoners were sentenced by 'court martial', with harsh punishments that included flogging, for rebelling in Sambalpur, along with prison sentences ranging from ten to twenty years. This seems to have caused a serious problem when these prisoners landed in Cuttack, as it meant the magistrate 'administering 2,000 strokes in all', which was considered a difficult as well as a 'cruel' task by the 'civil authorities'.[46]

Interestingly, as late as 1863, after Sambalpur had been transferred to the Central Provinces, the old demand of 'restoring native rule' was revived. A petition submitted by the 'land holders, brahmins and influential people of Sambalpur' to the chief commissioner, R. Temple, maintained that, if 'Surendra Sahai was made the Raja, all would be well and the Government, in place of losing the country, might demand a heavy tribute'.[47] This can perhaps be seen as a strategy to divert the attention of the colonial administration. After all, as discussed earlier, the two settlements of 1849 and 1854 had alienated a diverse section of the people in the Sambalpur region. The 1857 Rebellion continued almost unabated and Sahai was arrested only in 1864.

Mayurbhanj

Mayurbhanj was another major site where several attempts were made to mobilise the tribals for the Rebellion. On 6 December 1857, two Santhals had met Mr W. Hallam, a missionary, at Jallesore and reported to him about Ananda Majhi (of Tangboree) who sought to 'excite' the Santhals of Mayurbhanj and the adjoining area of Balasore (which was under the colonial administration) to join the rebellion. The tribals were given feasts and liquor to lure them and were told to be 'ready [with] their guns and arms … to fight with the English'. Ananda moved extensively from village to village in the 'jungles' of Mayurbhanj and Balasore to mobilise the tribal folk. Described as an 'ignorant Santhal', he was arrested by the Balasore *darogah* (police official) and tried by the magistrate of Balasore, who sentenced him to 'transportation for life'.

Interestingly, the level of panic in the colonial administration can be judged from a suggestion that was made, according to which the Mayurbhanj chief should have arrested the emissaries who had informed him about Ananda to show the Santhals that British rule was 'not at an end'. Moreover, in this hour of crisis, the colonial administration considered appointing Hallam, the missionary, as an honorary deputy magistrate, after this incident. It was felt that he was 'well qualified' and, interestingly, as described, he was 'not an American but a Canadian and therefore a British subject'.[48]As can be seen, the question of 'loyalty' and 'otherisation' assumed new meanings in what was undoubtedly a rather explosive phase in colonial Orissa's history.

The conflicts and confrontations with the tribals due to displacement from the Bamanaghati area of Mayurbhanj in the past also caused some anxiety to the chief in this phase. As reported by the chief to the colonial administration, the Dharooa tribals of the Bamanaghati area had been removed from the

state in the past. In the context of the Rebellion, the Maharaja's apprehension was fuelled by an anonymous petition that he received. It stated that Dayanidhi Sirdar (a Dharooa tribal chief) had mobilised tribals, including 500–600 Koles (tribals) and about 1,000 Dharooas for a meeting at Doomrea (in Dhulbhoom). The gathering had 'sworn' to murder the *amlah* (local revenue official of Mayurbhanj) and plunder and burn the treasury. In fact, the 'outbreak' was, as reported, fixed to take place in July or August (1857). In such a context, the chief of Mayurbhanj had summoned all his *paikas* to his headquarters (at Baripada) and also some others who were described as 'up-country men apparently merchants'.[49] Daynadhi, the 'ring leader', was expelled from Bamanaghati to a *zamindari* (land held by landlords). The colonial administration warned the Maharaja of Mayurbhanj to do everything within his power to prevent the peace from being disturbed.[50]

The insecurities that the Rebellion generated are also evident from a letter written by the executive engineer on the basis of what he had heard from a 'native Bengalee Brahmin Purmitoo Chunder Chatterjee'. As reported, the Mayurbhanj chief was collecting 'very large quantities of supplies' in response to a threat of losing his raj. He had apparently received a written note from a chief in the north-west, who had demanded these. The report went on to add that the Mayubhanj chief claimed that this was for a marriage in his family.[51] In fact, one can see how efforts by the Mayubhanj *durbar* to perhaps prepare itself for the challenges that it apprehended were perceived and reported to those associated with the colonial administrative system.

Pilgrim centres as sites of the Rebellion: Puri

During this period, one witnesses a deep sense of fear and insecurity that pilgrim centres such as Puri generated for the colonial administration. The fear of the congregation that assembled at Puri for the *rathajatra* (viz. the chariot festival associated with the famous Hindu deities Jagannatha, Balabhadra and Subhadra, held annually at Puri in July) turning 'rebellious' seems to have haunted the imagination of the colonial administration. People travelling from Balasore to Puri, especially discharged soldiers (or even those who were suspected of falling into this category) were viewed with suspicion. A series of restrictions were enforced to discourage these people from attempting to travel by road to Puri.[52] Besides, serious steps were taken to disarm people who were not in government and were travelling to Puri along the Jagannatha road.[53]

The 1857 Rebellion seems to have broader links also owing to the pilgrim traffic associated with Puri. References to 'pilgrim hunters' and their all-India network is something that is known to historians.[54] Nevertheless, what seems less well known relates to Chaki Khuntia, a *panda* (priest) of Puri.[55] Like many other 'pilgrim hunters', he travelled extensively all over India in search of devotees. These 'pilgrim hunters' took advances from those who wanted to travel to Puri, with the understanding that they would be taken around and

looked after when they visited Puri on pilgrimage. During the 1857 Rebellion, Chaki Khuntia was suspected of being a 'rebel' as he had good relations with some sepoys from northern India and was probably in some north Indian military station (most probably in Bihar) at that time. His long absence from Puri seems to have reinforced suspicion in the minds of the British authorities. It was also rumoured that he was directly involved with the Rebellion and that he had established contact with Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. His property was confiscated and he was arrested at Gaya, but was released soon after the Queen of England's Proclamation in 1858. The panic of the colonial establishment is also visible in the way in which it took serious measures to keep a close watch over about 167 sepoys who visited Puri between August and November 1857.[56]

Alongside, the official position about the Rebellion being a 'Muslim conspiracy' seems also to have propelled the colonial administration into action to charge a 'Mahomeddan lady' of the Puri district with 'having clandestinely removed five cannons from her house'. The initial inference drawn was that she was trying to help the rebels. Searches were conducted and the cannons were located in the Chilika lake. However, subsequent enquiries revealed that the lady had been scared at seeing the fate of the Kujang *zamindar,* and had wanted to get rid of the cannons.[57]

Stereotypes: the normal 'trouble makers'

In a context that made the colonial administration feel extremely insecure, sections of Orissan society such as the Khandaits (a 'martial' caste) haunted its imagination. The Khandaits had 'combined' to refuse payment of rent on several occasions in the past. They were composed of old and ruined sections of *zamindars*, whose position had been undermined under colonial rule. One such person who attracted the attention of the colonial administration was Ramakrushna Samantasimhar, the former *zamindar* of Ballia (Jajpur). We are told about Samantasimhar 'collecting weapons', using 'threatening language' and warning *ryots* (peasants) 'not to pay rent on the ground that the Company's rule was about to cease'. The *darogah* searched Samantasimhar's house and found a few swords and a couple of old matchlocks, after which he was arrested along with his followers Dinabandhu Mahapatra and Upendra Jena. Ramakrushna Samantasimhar was convicted, charged with 'seditious conduct' and his property attached.[58]

Conclusion

As can be seen, the 1857 Rebellion neither started nor ended in 1857–58. By discussing the way in which the 1857 Rebellion connected apparently diverse regions and people, this chapter contests colonial discourse, especially its mapping of the Rebellion which was based on a strategy of 'containing' it ideologically. Similarly, the assertions of 'subaltern' historians such as Ranajit

Guha about the territoriality of the 'subaltern' cannot be accepted, especially if one bears in mind the social basis of the Rebellion in the hills of western Orissa, where it assumed the form of guerrilla warfare.

At the same time, one should not overemphasise the broader linkages and deny the specificities of the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa. Thus, as discussed, this was conditioned by the way the colonisation of the region affected the people and, of course, the social base of the Rebellion, which accounts for its dynamism and militancy. What was witnessed is the merging of diverse struggles that united a wide section of the population ranging from marginal people to some affluent sections against a common enemy. This perhaps defined the power of the 1857 Rebellion and the popular support it had in large parts of Orissa, which was demonstrated by the active participation of the marginal people, including tribals, outcastes and women.

What is clearly discernible is a shift in the site of rebellion – from the coastal tract to Sambalpur (an essentially urban locale in western Orissa), and subsequently to the hills and forests of western Orissa. As delineated, the social composition of the participants, coupled with the involvement of some sepoys, was a significant element that provided the basis for armed guerrilla warfare for the first time, on such a wide scale, in colonial Orissa.

One can notice three characteristic features of the Rebellion, when it comes to the hills of western Orissa. Thus, these included rumours, the selectivity of the targets and the idea of avoiding 'positional' conflicts which were incorporated imaginatively by the rebels. Thus, many of the rumours that circulated were aimed at creating panic among the colonial administrators and demoralising the colonial army, and were rewarded with some degree of success. Coming to the selectivity of the targets (which included the manner in which the sepoys were spared), the effort to disrupt communication links (such as the movement of *dak* or the blocking of roads with trees), as well as the adoption of guerrilla warfare, reveal the meticulous planning and organisation of the rebels.

Alongside, one needs to be clear about certain aspects relating to the struggle against colonialism in this phase. Thus, it had diverse characteristics, and cannot be straight-jacketed into a simple, anti-imperialist movement, or a mere 'restorative' movement, involving Surendra Sahai, as it is generally projected by nationalist historians.[59] This was especially so because of the problems faced by the tribals and outcastes with the colonisation of Orissa which, among other things, polarised class and caste. This is visible in the way in which the internal exploiters – ranging from the rajas and big landlords to the Hindu upper castes – positioned themselves vis-à-vis colonialism and the large section of the people who were on the side of the Rebellion. In this sense, at least, the 1857 Rebellion saw a dominant section of the princes and *zamindars* aligning themselves with colonialism, which seems to be a rather unique facet of the 1857 Rebellion in Orissa.

The colonial administrative system seems to have been guided by the way the Rebellion had been stereotyped as a 'Muslim' conspiracy. One sees this in

the case of the 'Mohomeddan lady' of Puri we have mentioned. Similarly, one witnesses the stereotyping of Khandaits – a 'martial' caste – for their anti-imperialist resistance in the past. The Rebellion made the colonial order insecure of the landed sections of the Khandait caste, whose economic position had declined after Orissa's colonisation. This is borne out in the case of Ramakrushna Samantasimhar whom we have mentioned.

One can end by mentioning Chakara Bisoi – the legendary, 'omni-present' rebel we referred to at the beginning of this chapter. He seems to have 'faded away' by the time the 1857 Rebellion began. In many ways, this illustrates deeper aspects related to the survival strategies of the poor. After all, the need for drawing upon Chakara seems to have withered away and been replaced by a struggle that incorporated broader dimensions and assumed a serious level of significance. In this sense, perhaps, popular perceptions related to resisting imperialist onslaughts seem to have been reordered during the course of the 1857 Rebellion.

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Notes

1 For some details, see Mukherjee (1984) and Roy (1994).
2 For a critical discussion related to the historiography of the 1857 Rebellion, see the Introduction in Pati (2007).
3 Thus, it is not unusual to hear references to 1857 in this way; one can refer here to Lakshmi (2007: 1746–53), who uses the term 'mutiny' without any qualifiers in this article.
4 For details, see Pati (1989).
5 Guha (1983: 308).
6 Roy (1994).
7 Singh (1998: 76–85).
8 Here, I have in mind Mahtab *et al* (1957: vol. 2, 7–73); the second chapter, entitled 'Surendra Sahai', focuses on Sahai, even as it reproduces official accounts of the Rebellion in western Orissa.
9 For some details, see Pati (1994: ch. 1; 2001: ch. 5; 2006: 175–201).
10 A.G. Macneill, in charge of the agency Hill Tracts to Secretary, Government of India, 3 January 1856, Foreign Department, 14 March 1856, nos 95–98/ FC, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI).
11 See, for example, MacPherson (1842); Campbell (1986[1864]); McNeill (1861).
12 A classic example is Brandstadter (1985: 89–107).
13 Here, I have in mind anthropologists such as Pfeffer (2006: 347–64) who, correctly, contests the 'fact' regarding the system of human sacrifice that was supposedly practiced by the Kandhas.

14 For details, see Pati (2003).
15 For details see Pati (2001: 101–4).
16 For details Mahtab *et al* (1957: vol. 1, 189–92; vol. 2, 1–6).
17 O'Malley (1932: 29).
18 O'Malley (1932: 29–30).
19 O'Malley (1932: 30).
20 O'Malley (1932: 30).
21 Ramusack (2004: 82, also 81, 83–84). See also Bandyopadhyay (2004: 60, 172) for details related to this policy of annexation.
22 Kumar (1991: 258).
23 O'Malley (1932: 34).
24 O'Malley (1932: 34); this also included some tribal chiefs and Brahmins who held privileged tenures.
25 Judicial Department, General Letters to the Court of Directors, September, November and December 1857; and File no. F4/2714, India Office Library, London (hereafter IOL).
26 Dalton (1918); in fact, Dalton warned about the possibility of 'an attempt' being made to take Sambalpur and the idea that it should be 'reinforced from Cuttack'; Kumar (1991: 262–70); O'Malley (1932: 35). In fact, the Santal pargannas – that had been formed after the brutal crushing of the Santal rebellion of 1855–56 – saw an explosive situation; for details, see Sinha (2007a: 120–42).
27 O'Malley (1932: 35).
28 O'Malley (1932: 36).
29 O'Malley (1932: 36).
30 From Major J. Bates, Cuttack, to G.F. Cockburn, Commissioner Cuttack, 26 November 1857, Accession no. 1535G, Orissa State Archives (hereafter OSA), Bhubaneshwar.
31 O'Malley (1932: 36); Captain R.T. Leigh, senior assistant commissioner, Sambalpur, to E.T. Dalton, officiating commissioner, Chotanagpur, 23 November 1857, and Hanson's statement, 23 November 195729, Mutiny Collection (IOL); Judicial Proceedings 298, 17 December 1857; and 147, 11 March 1858, WBSA.
32 O'Malley (1932: 36); Captain R.T. Leigh, senior assistant commissioner, Sambalpur, to E.T. Dalton, officiating commissioner, Chotanagpur, 26 November 1857, 195729 Mutiny Collection, IOL; from Cockburn to Commissioner Sambalpur, 13 February, 1858, 197590 Mutiny Collection, IOL.
33 O'Malley (1932: 36); note the reference is to Sambalpur.
34 O'Malley (1932: 36–37).
35 O'Malley (1932: 37).
36 From the Commissioner, Cuttack District, to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, 16 February 1858, Home Department/Public Branch, nos 105–8, 12 March 1858, NAI; from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India – the 'Report from the Commissioner of Cuttack', 1975790 Mutiny Collection, IOL; O'Malley (1932: 38).
37 From Captain W.R. Forster, officiating commissioner of Sambalpore, to E.H. Lushington, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 17 December 1859, Home Department/Public A Branch, nos 24–26, 20 March 1860, NAI.
38 Home Department /Public A Branch, nos 24–26, 20 March 1860, NAI.
39 From Col. H. Forster, commissioner of Sambalpur to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, 31 May 1858, Home Department/Public Branch, nos 35–37, 9 July 1858, NAI; O'Malley (1932: 38).
40 Home Department/Public Branch, nos 35–37, 9 July 1858, NAI.
41 Foreign Department S.C. nos 101–2, 30 October 1857, NAI.
42 Office of the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals, Cuttack, to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, 27 August 1858. Foreign Department/Political Proceedings, 39–42 FC, 5 November 1858, NAI.

43 From Captain W.R. Forster, officiating commissioner of Sambalpore, to E.H. Lushington, officiating secretary to the Government of Bengal, 17 December 1859, Home Department/Public A Branch, nos 24–26, 20 March 1860, NAI.
44 Table 4.1 is based on Judicial Department Proceedings 157, 8 April 1858, WBSA.
45 For insights into this dimension, see Pati (2003).
46 Judicial Department Proceedings 250–51, 17 June 1858, WBSA.
47 O'Malley (1932: 40).
48 W.H. Elliot, commissioner Balasore to F.J. Halliday, Lt Governor of Bengal, 10 December 1857; V.H. Schalch to H.T. Prinsep, Balasore, 6 December 1857, 195729 Mutiny Collection, IOL; Judicial Department Proceedings 248, 13 May 1858, WBSA; Letter from the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals, Cuttack, to the Secretary of Government of Bengal, 27 August 1858, 39–42 FC, Foreign Department/Political Proceedings, 5 November 1858, NAI.
49 Judicial Department Proceedings 1225–27, 10 September 1857, WBSA; the anonymous petition was written in Bengali (and translated into English by the Maharaja) and addressed to the *amlah* at Bamanaghati. It seems that the local officials of Mayurbhanj had also heard of this. Interestingly, it mentioned remarks that had been made about how, under the rule of the 'feringhees' (foreigners), the power of the rajas was only 'nominal', the 'sahebs' (white men/English rulers) being the 'virtual masters' who had reduced all others to 'obedience' – unlike in the days of the Badshahee (Mughals), when the rajas were the 'supreme' rulers of their 'own territory'.
50 Judicial Department Proceedings 941–49, 10 August 1857, WBSA.
51 Letter from F. Brine, executive engineer, 6 December 1857, Mutiny Collection 195729, IOL.
52 Judicial Department Proceedings 111–12, 4 February 1858; and 119, 18 March 1858, WBSA.
53 Judicial Department Proceedings 801, 24 June 1857, WBSA.
54 For details, see Pati (2001: 54, 69).
55 It seems his original name was Chandan Hajuri.
56 Mahtab *et al* (1957: vol. 2, 87–88); Barik (2006: 22).
57 Judicial Department, General Letters, November 1857, WBSA. The reference to the Kujang *zamindar* needs to be clarified. Thus, the colonial administration seems to have viewed the Raja of Kujang – a *zamindar* – with suspicion because he had in his possession twenty *maunds* (a measurement) of gunpowder, half a *maund* of sulphur and 3,550 bullets, for which he was fined an amount of 500 rupees. However, it was later found that he had 'no hostile designs' and had only tried to ensure his own defence; Judicial Department, General Letters to the Court of Directors, 'Report from the Agent in the Hill Tracts of Orissa', November 1857, Vol. 45, WBSA.
58 *Report of Criminal Administration for 1857*, quoted in Mahtab *et al* (1957: vol. 2, 85).
59 See, for example, Mahtab *et al* (1957: vol. 1).

5 Forests on fire

The 1857 Rebellion in tribal Andhra

B. Rama Chandra Reddy

The 1857 Rebellion was undoubtedly an epoch-making event in the history of colonial India. There seems to be a general perception that the Great Uprising was confined to parts of northern and central India, with the Madras presidency, and specifically the Andhra region, being untouched by it. M. Venkatarangaiya does mention the turbulence among the tribals in the hill tracts, along with a few raids by the Rohillas of the Nizam's territory. However, he does not see any connection between these and the happenings in north India, and more specifically the 1857 Rebellion.[1] Ironically, even present-day research reinforces this misconception.[2] Although it is not possible to trace direct links between a historical process spread over two diverse geographical regions, as we shall see later in this chapter, echoes of the 1857 Upsurge were heard in the Andhra tract as well. In keeping with this thrust, this chapter focuses on the way in which the tribals of Andhra interacted with the Great Uprising, in an effort to unravel some of the hitherto invisible complexities associated with the 1857 Rebellion.[3]

Revolts prior to 1857

There is a long history of mutinies and rebellions in the Andhra region against the East India Company that needs to be kept in mind while exploring the repercussions of the Great Rebellion of 1857 in this region. Indeed, well before the famed and much written about Vellore Mutiny of 1806, there had been incidents of sepoys defying English authority in the Madras presidency.[4] In the Andhra region of the Madras presidency too, there were distinct sepoy mutinies before the 1857 Uprising. Indeed, there are records of a number of mutinies in the late eighteenth century. The earliest of them, which was also possibly the first mutiny in the Madras presidency to have turned violent, occurred as far back as 1780 in the region of Vizagapatnam. The sepoys' grievances included demands for extra allowances to meet the impending threat of Hyder Ali. At the same time, the sepoys, especially the Muslim soldiers, considered it an offence to fight against Hyder Ali who belonged to their own faith, and they mutinied under the leadership of Subedar Shaik Mahommed on 4 October 1780.[5] Probably on account of a similar empathy

for Hyder Ali, the Company's sepoys, led by Colonel Baillie in the garrison, also refused to go by sea to Madras and chose to remain inactive at Ongole.[6] Another mutiny took place the following year in Masulipatam, when ninety-six men of the Fourth Battalion, most of them commissioned officers, 'deserted' their ranks on 9 January 1781, when ordered to embark for operations in the Carnatic under Captain Chessyre. This was followed by 'desertion' by thirteen more sepoys the next day and, fearing that more would follow, the British cancelled the order and succeeded in subduing the mutinous spirit.[7]

Indeed, prior to 1857, there were as many as forty recorded revolts against the East India Company in which large sections of the peasants and tribals were mobilised. These indicate the widespread resistance to the attempts by the East India Company to establish its supremacy. In fact, these revolts were so frequent during 1832–34 that the Madras government appointed George Russell as special commissioner with extraordinary powers to suppress the revolts and to ascertain their causes. Many of these were led by the aristocratic sections, whose position had been undermined by the colonial interventions. Most of these revolts aimed to get back privileges and to turn back the growing tide of foreign domination. In the nineteenth century, prior to the 1857 Rebellion, these acts of resistance against the British were suppressed with brute force by the East India Company as it proceeded to consolidate its rule. Some of the rebel leaders were transported to far off places, and others were hanged at the site of their crimes and their bodies exhibited, suspended in iron cages and gibbeted after execution and allowed to moulder away. Nevertheless, after the 1850s, resistance to colonial domination seems to have died down in the plains.

The Andhra plains and the Great Rebellion

Around the time when north India was in flames from May 1857 onwards during the Great Uprising of 1857, a number of revolts – which were not merely coincidental – took place in the Andhra region. The immediate precursor to the Great Uprising was a mutiny on 28 February 1857 of the 'native' sepoys of Vizianagaram belonging to the First Regiment 'native' Infantry. On being issued orders to march to Kurnool, the regiment mutinied because they had not been provided with carriages for moving their families with them.[8] The sepoys who stood assembled on the parade ground refused to obey orders issued by Colonel Goldsworthy to 'fix their bayonets'. Instead, a loud murmur rose from among the ranks, and on investigating, it was found that they were demanding that they be kept in Vizianagaram until their families could accompany them. Despite several assurances from their officers that their families would be protected in their absence, the sepoys remained adamant. Eventually, their officers had to yield to their demands. The sepoys were then informed that they could halt at a grove about one and a half miles from the cantonment and have their families join them in carriages. Each company was addressed, and the sepoys moved off the ground, uttering the

usual cry of 'Deen', 'Deen' (religion). On reaching the grove, contrary to their orders, they piled up their arms and left, rather ran away, from the place. The officer commanding later reported:

> I am of the opinion that what took place this morning was by pre-concerted arrangement and that the ill-feeling exhibited by the Corps is not confined to particular individuals but generally shared by all. The very mutinous conduct of the Corps in my opinion renders it necessary that an example, and if possible, an immediate one, should be made of some of the men but I am perfectly unable owing to the very small force here to act upon this opinion.[9]

But the Adjutant General ordered the ringleaders to be confined and the sentences to be carried out in conformity with the instant trials.[10]

Interestingly, the starting point of the 1857 Uprising in Andhra can be traced to the port city of Masulipatam. The rebellion in north India had exploded at Meerut on 10 May 1857. If one is to go by the official reports, the events of the rebellion in north India seem to have inspired the 'Muslims' in the Andhra region. Thus, in the months that followed the uprising in the north, a series of incidents occurred over the south that revealed the resentment of the populace against the British. Rebels in the north had declared the Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, as their leader in May 1857. Significantly, in the southern region too, there were similar efforts by 'Muslim' rebels to declare their allegiance to the Mughal emperor of Delhi. Thus, two months after the start of the rebellion at Meerut, it was reported at Masulipatam on 10 July 1857 that a green, triangular-shaped flag on a pole, covered with green cloth 'of an unusual appearance' was pitched in front of the parade ground, with the purpose of 'inciting' the armed forces. Attached to the pole was a placard in a small glazed frame, which had writing in Hindustani (the language of north India), calling upon 'the followers of Mohamed to slay all Infidels and Nazarenes'. This display of defiance was followed, a little later, by prayers offered at the local mosques for the success of the Moghul Padshah (Mughal Emperor) of Delhi.[11]

Following this, a week later, on 17 July 1857, two rebels, Turabaz Khan and Moulvi Allauddin, led an attack on the British residency at Hyderabad. They were supported by a 'crowd' of 5,000 people, including the Rohillas and the civil population. Although this attempt was unsuccessful, the attack was deeply significant as it revealed intense local anger. Then again, about a month later in Cuddapah, on 28 August 1857, one Sheik Peer Shah tried to 'incite' the 'native' officers and men of the 30th Regiment 'native' Infantry. Displaying once again, like the rebels of north India, an allegiance to the Delhi emperor, he predicted that, during the Mohorrum festival, 'the English Government would cease, and the Moghul dynasty re-established, that the muskets of the English troops would be harmless as they would not fire, and the edge of the swords would be blunt'. Sheik Peer Shah also warned that 'the

English [had] ordered the Mussalmans to eat pork and the Hindus beef, and [had also] applied the fat of the pig and cow to the cartridges, and gave them to the sepoys to bite, thereby converting all persons to Christianity'. He declared that 'the Subadar Major [a Muslim] was the box, the Adjutant Jemadar [a Hindu] was the key [an allegorical allusion to the former being the chief depository of valuables], who would be of no service without the assistance of the latter, who was the medium of communicating orders to the sepoys of the Regiment'. [12]

Despite the fact that their attack on the British residency at Hyderabad was foiled,[13] the Rohillas continued to make frequent forays into the Andhra region with 'other objects than plunder in view'. They made several raids on villages in the Cuddapah, Kurnool and Krishna districts that were under the control of the British. One raid, on Rudravaram (in Cuddapah district), was of a serious nature in which three people were killed and thirteen injured and the village plundered.[14]

Reports suggest that the rebel attack on the British residency at Hyderabad on 17 July 1857 seems to have particularly inspired the Muslim population. This becomes clear with the occurrence of an incident a few days later. On 21 July 1857, a defiant placard, with writing in Telugu, was put up at Vizagapatam, supposedly under the orders of the Emperor of Delhi. It urged the people to revolt against Company rule and rename Vizagapatam 'Mahomedpatam' from the day of the Mohurrum. The placard further stated: 'We will easily protect those people who supply provisions and give assistance to us, the people of "Mahomed"', and threatened those who failed to comply with dire consequences that would be 'two folds of what was lately done at Delhi'.[15]

A similar 'Muslim plot' to rise against the government during the Mohorrum festival was unearthed at Rajahmundry in August 1857, and the eleven men involved in it were apprehended. The acting head assistant, F.B. Molony, reported:

> I am now endeavouring to obtain further evidence against the accused, but have but small hopes of success, as all those who know anything of the plot, are of course Mahomedans and they will not give evidence against their co-religionists, and very probably are more or less deeply implicated themselves.[16]

In fact, earlier on, in June 1857, rumours were rife in Cuddapah that many Muslims had 'disappeared' and had gone away in large numbers to north India to join the Great Uprising there.[17] What becomes rather obvious here are the efforts of colonial officialdom to stereotype the Great Uprising as a 'Muslim affair' in this region. This was indeed in line with the colonial projection of the 1857 Rebellion as a 'Muslim' uprising. Moreover, the invoking of the Mughal emperor needs to be located here as an attempt by the rebels to associate themselves and the Andhra region with the emerging alternative

order of the Mughal Badshah in the north. As this chapter seeks to show, what needs to be stressed instead is that the rebellions in the Andhra region had a broad social base, with diverse sections of the population from across different faiths joining in the events of 1857. Thus, an incident on 7 November 1857 reveals the coming together of both 'Muslims' and 'Hindus': a large body of armed Rohillas and 'Tellagas' (a cultivating caste of the Telugus) attacked Juggaiahpet, a trading town in Krishna district, located on the frontiers of the Nizam's territories. They looted the treasury after killing four sepoys on guard duty and plundered several houses. It was estimated that they carried away loot worth more than a lakh of rupees.[18]

Apart from this, the colonial authorities seem to have been haunted by fears of a possible intrusion from the 'north', in the form of Bengal sepoys and emissaries entering the Madras presidency, for purposes of inciting mistrust and dislike in the minds of the people and sepoys. Apprehensive about the danger of such incursions taking place, the government issued strict orders to the magistrates of the coastal districts 'to detain in custody any sepoys of the Bengal Army who may enter' their district. They also cautioned them 'to scrutinize carefully all *Faqueers* [Muslim mendicants], *Byragees* [Hindu mendicants] and *Pundarums* [non-Brahmin priests], as deserters from Bengal Regiments are likely to assume such characters for disguise'. In fact, some such newcomers were detained by the authorities of the Godavari district.[19]

However, it needs to be pointed out that, despite all the turbulence that these scattered incidents caused, the fact is that they did not seriously threaten the Company's rule in Andhra. Instead, the real challenge faced by the British was posed from unexpected quarters – the tribal people.

Fire in the hills

From the very beginning of the East India Company's rule in Andhra in 1766, instances had occurred of tribals defying British authority, either directly or in collaboration with the 'native' chiefs. The tribals would frequently swoop down on to the plains and carry away valuables and grain from the villagers, occasionally resorting to violence. These unnoticed and unrecorded acts of violent aggression, made at the cost of their lives, must be construed as revolts against the Company's authority. As will be seen, the Great Rebellion also caused some ripples in the hill tracts of Godavari and the Vizagapatnam districts of the Andhra region.

In this phase, several of the tribal chiefs, deprived of their traditional rights to collect revenue, rose up in scattered revolts against the British. A key figure in this regard was the tribal chief, Korukonda Subba Reddy, who belonged to the Konda Reddy tribe[20] and was the hill chief of Koratur village situated on the banks of the River Godavari in the Godavari district (presently West Godavari) of Andhra.[21] Traditionally, Korukonda Subba Reddy and Rama Reddy, another hill chief from Kondamodalu village, had enjoyed the right

to collect a fee on all articles that used the river transport system.[22] According to this practice, Subba Reddy would supervise the collection of fees and a share of the sum realised would be handed over to Rama Reddy and, later on, to his son, Linga Reddy.[23] However, in 1852, the subcollector, deeming it unauthorised, decided put a stop to it – an action that generated tension between the East India Company and Subba Reddy and sowed great resentment in the latter's mind against the subcollector's action, which meant financial loss for him.

Further adding fuel to fire was the government policy of not allowing Subba Reddy to take possession of the Nagavaram tract. Nagavaram was an important hill fort that had played a vital role in the anti-British revolts in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. At this point of time, it was in the possession of two widows, Lakshmi Narasamma and Sitamma. When some prominent people in the locality tried to take possession of it, Lakshmi Narasamma expressed her wish to adopt Subba Reddy's son, Munga Reddy, as her heir. Further, Subba Reddy calculated that, by arranging a marriage between his son Munga Reddy and Sitamma, the young widow, he would succeed in gaining control over the entire estate. However, Sitamma began to live as a mistress of Sunkara Swamy, the *munsif* (headman) of Buttaya Gudem and its surrounding villages – with the result that Sunkara Swamy was virtually in charge of the affairs of Sitamma's part of the estate. Foiled in his attempts, Subba Reddy bided his time in the hope of some favourable development.[24] This was evident from his proclamation made in the course of his revolt that Nagavaram belonged to him and that the revenue from it was to be paid to him alone. In fact, he even collected certain sums of revenue from the people of that area in the latter part of 1857.

By this time, the whole of north India was in flames because of the 1857 Uprising. Taking advantage of the prevailing chaotic conditions in the north, a timber trader named Kocherlakota Ramabrahmam encouraged Subba Reddy to rise up against the 'authority of the government and by so doing he [Subba Reddy] would gain the day and will be made zamindar of Polavaram estate by "*Nana Waroo*" [Nana Saheb] as there is no male heir to that Zamindary'.[25] Later, during his trial, Subba Reddy disclosed in his statement, made before Henry Morris, the submagistrate, that: 'I [had] heard that Nana Saheb was advancing with his victorious army and whosoever did most against the English would be rewarded more'.[26]

It has been pointed out that rumour is a 'universal and necessary carrier of insurgency in any pre-industrial, pre-literate society' and, arguably, rumour did travel with remarkable rapidity during the 1857 Uprising in India.[27] Indeed, throughout south India during this phase, rumours were rife and were widely believed to be true by the public.[28] What is more, in the popular imagination too, a significant link seems to have been established with the 1857 Rebellion in north India. At the same time, the possibility of being incorporated by the emerging alternative order of the rebels tempted Subba Reddy to rise in revolt against the British.

On 17 September 1857, Subba Reddy's revolt began as a raid with 400 rebels on the village of Buttaya Gudem, of which Sunkara Swamy was the *munsif*. His aim was to forcibly carry away the young widow Sitamma and punish Sunkara Swamy. When the group was unsuccessful in both ventures, they plundered the village and ransacked the house of Sunkara Swamy. The rebels then went to Nagavaram (the headquarters of the *mutta*) with booty and cattle and strongly entrenched themselves in the old fort where they were joined by some more rebels. The members of the rebellion mainly came from the Konda Reddy and Koya[29] tribes and belonged to the villages of Koratur, Koppalle, Kannapuram, Pada, Nagavaram and surrounding villages. The rebel party issued proclamations calling upon all the surrounding villages of Tudimalla *taluk* (administrative unit) and Gutala division to pay the land revenue to Subba Reddy, and they also collected revenue from the ryots of several villages.[30] Shortly after this, Subba Reddy put a stop to the navigation of the Godavari river by anyone who declined to pay him fees, apart from seizing their persons and their property.

Reacting quickly, the government dispatched Mr Molony, the head assistant magistrate, with 60 peons, accompanied by the *tahasildar* (chief administrative officer of a *taluk* or administrative unit) of Tudimella *taluk*. After apprehending four people involved in the insurrection and recovering some of the stolen property, Molony and his party camped at Buttaya Gudem for the night. But the very next morning, that is on 23 September 1857, they were taken by surprise and surrounded by 500–600 men led by Subba Reddy and his associate Korla Venkata Subba Reddy. In the negotiations, Subba Reddy told Molony, 'If you would give him [Sunkara Swamy] up and the said woman [Sitamma], together with our four men already kept under your guard, we should go back without fighting with you or else we should put you … and your troops to death by firing our guns'.[31] Terrified at the sight of these rebels, several government peons also fled and hid themselves. Molony found that he was left with no option but to hand over Sunkara Swamy, along with the captured rebels and the recovered property.

The overpowering of Molony's party by the rebels caused great anxiety. Following this disturbing event, the district officials sent two companies of sappers and miners along with two more companies of 'native' Infantry (7th and 9th) under military officers to quell the incipient revolt. As the troops passed through the villages, rebels frequently fired upon them from the fields of *cholum* (Indian corn) and from behind rocks and woods. Captain Hudson narrated the difficulties faced by the troops thus:

> I consider it rather an imprudent measure to bring troops into such dense jungle, where the foot-path only admits of a file of men and if a vigilant enemy were opposed to us who knew the jungle paths, we might be much harassed without being able to retaliate with any chance of success.[32]

Their problems were further compounded by the onset of winter in the pestilential, malaria-prone jungle tracts.[33] The sappers and miners, subjected to such

unaccustomed exposure to the pestilential climate, were overcome with fatigue and sent back; and after a fortnight's stay, the jungle fever broke out again most violently, forcing the rest of the troops to return to cantonments on 28 October 1857.[34] Commenting on the folly of this attack, their commanding officer, Captain B. Hudson, later reported,

> Jungle fever has broken out most violently in the detachment under my command. … I cannot help observing, it was a most imprudent measure of the collector taking a large body of troops into the hills at this season of the year, when the climate is always known to be prejudicial to health.

He lamented that the employment of troops in the hills had turned out to be 'a wild goose chase'.[35]

These initial failures to contain the rebels forced the colonial authorities to rethink and to adopt new strategies to weaken the rebellion. This included the offer of attractive rewards, ranging from 100 to 500 rupees for the apprehension of the rebel leaders. Later, they raised the rewards to 2,500 rupees and 1,000 rupees on the heads of Korukonda Subba Reddy and his associate Korla Venkata Subba Reddy respectively.[36] In addition, the officials also sought to apply a 'divide and rule' policy among different tribes by trying to separate the Koyas from the Konda Reddys, but their efforts failed.[37] Soon after this, at the request of the collector, the government appointed the Golgonda Sibbandy Corps (a 'native' force raised for operations in the hills after 1848) under the command of Lieutenant Alleyne F.F. Bloomfield. This Sibbandy Corps was far more resistant to jungle fever and therefore well suited for such operations in the hills and jungles.

What ensued was the beginning of a protracted guerrilla war in the hills: the rebels remained skilfully hidden during the counter-insurgency operations; every now and then, Company troops would find a matchlock being discharged from behind a rock or a bush in their direction – but the person firing it stayed hidden. Frequently, the rebels pestered the forces and the matchlock men assaulted British pickets at night. Moreover, they often prevented supplies from reaching the counter-insurgency parties. Alarmed at these developments, the government employed harsh, punitive measures against villages who were suspected of helping the rebels. Thus, if a sepoy or a camp follower was wounded by an unseen or distant opponent, the nearest village would be burnt down as an exemplary warning to supporters of the rebels.[38]

In their turn, the rebels were equally harsh to people who helped the British or declined to join their revolt. For instance, despite temptation and threats, the tribal leader Kondamodalu Linga Reddy, who shared the transit fees on the Godavari river with Subba Reddy, desisted from joining the revolt because of his mother's influence. Instead, he gave all assistance in his power to government officers during the rebellion. Out of vengeance, the rebels killed his servant, Dora Papadu, as he was returning from Bloomfield's camp.[39] To cite another example, when Podem Yerrappa of Madhavapuram village declined

to join the revolt, he was taken out and shot dead.[40] However, the rebels were soon put on the defensive by the prompt measures taken by Bloomfield and his men, who went in pursuit of them. While the rebels swooped down upon villages for supplies, grain and other necessities, Bloomfield inflicted stringent punishments on those villages that assisted them. In their turn, the rebels too burnt down some villages, including Devipatnam, Veeravaram and Purushottapatnam, as acts of retaliation because those villagers had been helping the government.

After the initial successes, however, the tide of events soon started to turn against the rebels. Bloomfield, who had earlier failed to free the River Godavari, now went up the river in an iron steamer as far as Koratur, the 'native' village of the rebel chief. After a bitter battle there, he seized a large quantity of cotton consigned for a gentleman of Kakinada.[41] Later, Bloomfield boldly entered Koratur with his *Sibbandies* to apprehend the tribal rebel chief and his son – but they managed to flee into the Rampa country, which was on the other side of the River Godavari.[42] This act of daring on the part of Bloomfield, followed by the flight of the rebel leaders, unnerved the remaining rebels and the revolt seems to have died down by April 1858. The colonial army pursued and captured almost all the remaining leaders of the rebellion by the end of June. On 11 June 1858, Korukonda Subba Reddy was captured as a result of the treachery of Chintapalli Dasi Reddy; after his capture, he told Appala Raju, the head of the police: 'Ah, had I had even 10 men still with me, would you ever have taken me?'[43]

Thus, in the space of ten months, the revolt among the tribals in 1857–58 was finally suppressed. The British dealt severely with the rebel leaders and their followers: five of them were sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans; two were awarded 'penal servitude in banishment' for fourteen years in some jail south of Guntur district, and eight more, including Korukonda Subba Reddy, were given death sentences.[44] On 7 October 1858, the tribal rebel leaders Korukonda Subba Reddy and Korla Setharamaiah were finally hanged at the village of Buttaya Gudem. Korla Venkata Subba Reddy and Guruguntla Kommi Reddy suffered a similar fate at the village of Polavaram; and Korukonda Tummi Reddy was hanged at Tudigunta, the respective places of their allegedly grave 'crimes'. F.R. Hemingway notes that the gallows in Polavaram on which the ringleaders were hanged remained as a 'grim relic' for decades until it was finally carried away by floods in 1900.[45] According to oral tradition, the dead body of Korukonda Subba Reddy was kept on display in an iron cage, later termed the 'Subba Reddy *Sanchi*' (bag), and was left hanging for a long time by the British for public viewing in order to create terror in the people's minds about the fate of a rebel.[46]

Revolt in Gudem

During the time when the British authorities were facing serious problems in suppressing Subba Reddy's revolt in the Godavari hill areas, another revolt

flared up in the Gudem hill areas[47] of Visakhapatnam district. The forested, hilly region of the Gudem hills had traditionally been under the control of the rulers of Golgonda, and this rebellion was an attempt to restore the rule of the erstwhile Raja's family to the Golgonda *zamindari* (hereditary proprietary estate). At the inception of the East India Company's rule in the northern Circars in the eighteenth century, the Golgonda ruler used to be a tributary of the Raja of Vizianagaram. When, in 1793, the Company had seized the Vizinagaram *zamindari*, Golgonda had come under the direct control of the Company and, during the permanent settlement of 1802–3, the *peshkush* (tribute) to be paid to the Company was fixed at 10,000 rupees.

Background

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, after some internal feuds, Ananta Bhupathi, described as an 'imbecile', became the *zamindar* in 1812. By this time, the *zamindari* was on the brink of bankruptcy. The British persuaded Ananta Bhupathi to resign in favour of his grandmother, Jamma Devamma, who had been managing the affairs of the *zamindari* for some time. Devamma was recognised by the British as the *zamindarini*. However, the tribal Bagatha *muttadars* (the head of a *mutta* or a group of ten to twelve villages) objected to the move as they had not been consulted, as per the customary system and also because no woman had ever ruled them before.[48] At this, Ananta Bhupathi 'instigated' the *muttadars* who abducted his grandmother in May 1836 and murdered her in the jungle. These developments caused considerable worry to the authorities, who intervened by confiscating the *zamindari* and restoring order. Ananta Bhupathi was convicted of complicity in Jamma Devamma's murder and 'confined' in the fort of Gooty (in the Anantapur district) as a state prisoner.

Eventually, in 1837, the Golgonda *zamindari* was auctioned for arrears and was purchased by the Company itself for the paltry sum of 100 rupees.[49] The abolition of the Golgonda *zamindari* in 1837 affected three groups in the Gudem area: these consisted of the *zamindar's* family, the tribal *muttadars* and their armed retainers. This led to a lot of discontent culminating in a *fituri* (rebellion).[50] This was supported by the tribal *muttadars* who were linked by feudal loyalties to the Raja of Golgonda, under whom they had enjoyed major privileges; they were particularly keen to get back their privileges, which had been undermined after the establishment of colonial rule. After abolishing the Golgonda *zamindari*, the British had appointed a special *tahsildar* to oversee the matters of the Gudem area, and the *tahsildar* had summoned the *muttadars* to appear before him to answer for alleged crimes and violations of law.[51] What needs to be emphasised here is that the *muttadars* continued to exercise great influence among the hill people, among whom there was a general feeling that the 'ancient' family of Golgonda had been ill-treated by the English.[52] In the meanwhile, in the course of a trivial dispute that had arisen regarding a water course, some slight show of

inconsideration to one of the *muttadar's* party by the *tahsildar* brought about a 'hostile confederation' in October 1845.[53]

This group united to rise up in an insurrection against the government for the restoration of the Bhupathi family to the seat of Golgonda. After persuading the 19-year-old Chinna Bhupathi, son of Ananta Bhupathi, they declared him as their rightful king. Deciding to withhold all rents due to the government, they barricaded the hills and looted the villages on the plains after sweeping through them with fire and sword.[54] At that time, it appeared as if 'the District is entirely overrun with insurgent Banditte'.[55] To crush the revolt, the government sent military forces into the hills, but the difficulty of trekking through the mountain regions, the unhealthy climate and the inveterate loyalty of the rebels to their feudal chiefs rendered all attempts abortive; the troops, unable to find suitable guides in those hills and jungles were, above all, terrified of the jungle fever widely prevalent in that part of the country. For three long years, from 1845 to 1848, the rebels frustrated government efforts and only after the proclamation of an amnesty to all those concerned in the rebellion did the rebels, including Chinna Bhupathi, surrender in 1848.[56] The government granted 4,000 rupees as annual maintenance for four brothers of the Bhupathi family, one of whom subsequently died without issue, his allowance being divided among the remaining three.[57]

Gudem in 1857

This decision of the government pleased neither the *muttadars* nor the descendents of the *zamindari*, who wanted to achieve their cherished goal of restoring the Bhupathi family to the helm of Golgonda affairs. So, in 1858, they made another attempt, involving a new plan, according to which a member of the Bhupathi family would go to the hill country accompanied by some influential men of the hills and rise in revolt against the government. The government, they felt, would fail to suppress the revolt because of the lack of proper communication facilities, the inaccessibility of the hills and jungle fever; and in such a situation, the government would seek the assistance of Chinna Bhupathi, who would instantly intervene and end the uprising. The failure of the government machinery, they calculated, would force the authorities to believe that the hill people were unmanageable, and in order to ensure peace in the country, they would inevitably deliver the *zamindari* to Chinna Bhupathi. He, for his part, would persuade the authorities to pardon the insurgents as he had done earlier in the case of those who had supported his cause and had acted under his instructions during the uprising of 1845–48.[58]

The rebel leaders were not unaware of the political turmoil that was going on in northern India at that time. At least, it can be assumed with reasonable justification that Chinna Bhupathi was aware of the Rebellion of 1857 raging in the north. Moreover, this was also the time when the British authorities were facing serious problems suppressing the Subba Reddy revolt in the hill areas of the neighbouring Godavari district and the Danda Sena revolt in the

Ganjam district. In such a charged political atmosphere, the rebels considered it the most favourable time to strike at British power and to achieve their goal.

In April 1858, the principal leaders of the insurrection assembled at Manyapu Vurutla, the 'native' village of Chinna Bhupathi, and finalised their plans of operation.[59] On the night of 22 April, they marched from Manyapu Vurutla to the Gudem hills on their mission of rebellion under the leadership of Sanyasi Bhupathi, a nephew of Chinna Bhupathi.[60] On the day the insurgents set out from the village, Chinna Bhupathi despatched a letter to the *tahsildar* announcing the start of a *fituri*. After reaching Gudem, the rebels halted for several days and made a public avowal of the object of the *fituri*, calling upon the tribal *muttadars* to join them. In the temple of Virabhadra at Gudem village, the principal *muttadars*, Muttadam Iyapu Dora and Gantam Dora, who were aiding the rebellion, swore in the presence of several insurgents, placing their hands on the head of the God (Virabhadra) and then on the feet of Sanyasi Bhupathi, that 'they would never act contrary to the orders of the kings of Gudem and that having once entered on the affair, they would not withdraw'.[61] They were the *muttadars* of Gudem Kothavidhi and Gudem Pathavidhi respectively. Sanyasi Bhupathi was publicly declared as their king, and he claimed the revenue for himself instead of the British and in some cases received portions of money as revenue. By May 1858, after more recruits had joined, the strength of the rebels reached around 300 active members, fully armed with matchlocks, swords, battle axes and other 'offensive materials'.[62]

When they heard about this revolt, the authorities at Narasapatam sent the Sibbandy Corps in pursuit of the rebels. The agent (collector, so called in dealing with the affairs of the hill areas from 1839) sent two peons from Narasapatam to Gudem, one with a summons for Sanyasi Bhupathi and the other with a proclamation to that effect, while yet another peon was sent up to the Gudem area to collect revenue which was due from the *muttadars*. In the meanwhile, the commander, Captain Owen, sent two of his men to Gudem – but all five of them were caught by the rebels and confined for ten days.[63] Failing thus to settle the matter in the initial stages, the government next resorted to stern measures against the insurgents and moved all the Sibbandies into the hills. The tasks before the government officials were

> to protect the villages of Golgonda taluk in the vicinity of the ghats to the north, south and west of Narsapatam by means of patrol, observation of the neighbouring villages; to bring some head men of the hills to reason by occupying their villages and attaching their property, and to intercept and arrest as many of the armed chiefs and their followers as possible.[64]

Three parties of Sibbandi troops were sent out on 17 May 1858 to attach the properties of all the active leaders of the revolt. However, the colonial authorities faced several difficulties in the course of their operations in the hills: the inaccessible nature of the hills, the total absence of roads and other communication, coupled with the problem of jungle fever, stood in the way of

success for the government forces. Moreover, the month of April marked the beginning of the monsoon, and the tribal areas were notorious for their acute unhealthiness during the rains. Not surprisingly, the Sibbandy Corps suffered heavily on account of jungle fever; no less than seven of their members died in hospital at Narsapatam from fever and sickness contracted while pursuing the rebels in the hills. Even the commander, Captain Owen, was at times prostrated with fever and was advised more than once to go on leave on account of deteriorating health.[65] In contrast to the Sibbandies, who found it very difficult to get proper information about the rebels' movements, the intelligence system of the rebels was so effective that, for several months, they succeeded in evading all attempts at a surprise assault. In fact, on more than one occasion, the Sibbandies would reach the encampment of the rebels – only to find that 'the rebels had left but a short time previously'.[66] On 23 May 1858, Sanyasi Bhupathi and his party of rebels concealed themselves behind rocks and trees and fired upon the approaching Sibbandy Corps at Bandivalasa village, exchanging some sixty shots, with the Corps returning fire, but nobody was injured.[67]

Understandably, these disturbances caused great excitement in the area. Commenting on these developments, C.W. Reade (the agent to the governor) observed that the instigators had tried 'to create general disaffection throughout the country against the British Government' and that the offenders' crime was 'nothing short of treason'. [68] After several unsuccessful attempts by the Sibbandies, the government decided to offer rewards in the hope that these would encourage the capture of the ringleaders and help to bring the rebellion to a speedy conclusion. And thus, they announced rewards of 500 rupees each for the apprehension of the six important rebels and a reward of 100 rupees each for fourteen others.[69]

Notwithstanding the early successes, however, the rebellion, as it transpired, turned out to be short-lived. After firing on the Sibbandies at Bandivalasa, some of the active rebels lost their nerve and deserted the rebel group – including Krishna Bhupathi, the brother of Sanyasi Bhupathi, who left the party and fled to Jeypur. At first, even after the firing incident, Sanyasi Bhupathi continued to roam the jungles with his party. But later on, frightened by a narrow escape that he had at Andra Dobba, he too left the rebel group and fled to the Jeypur country. He was captured in September 1858 and confined under the orders of the Raja of Jeypur,[70] and this capture of Sanyasi Bhupathi struck a death blow to the insurrectionary movement. The announcement of money rewards, along with the terror unleashed by the Sibbandies, who confiscated properties and seized and burned rebellious villages, eventually proved to be effective. Besides, some influential men of the hills, such as the Thuggi family, extended support to the government to hunt down the rebels.[71] Eventually, the Golgonda Sibbandies captured the scattered and disheartened rebels in the jungles in quick succession, and this capture was soon followed by their prosecution. Captain Owen, who examined nearly 200 individuals, finally committed forty-five people to the court as

prisoners. While the trial was in progress, two of the prisoners died, and of the remaining forty-three, only thirteen were convicted.

Sanyasi Bhupathi, the leader and the proclaimed king of the rebels, was sentenced to transportation beyond the sea for life. Four rebels were sentenced to transportation for fourteen years,[72] four more were given transportation for ten years each,[73] while three others were awarded minor terms of imprisonment ranging from two to four years.[74] Chinna Bhupathi too was tried as the chief person who had actually planned and carried out the rebellion. Although throughout the trial, Chinna Bhupathi pleaded that he was not guilty, the agent, terming him the prime accused for starting the rebellion, commented that his role in the rebellion had been 'marked by a depth of cunning and villainy which had probably been seldom equalled and never excelled'.[75] After Chinna Bhupathi was sentenced to transportation beyond the sea for life,[76] the agent released all the thirty 'simple and uneducated, rude and ignorant' persons, on the grounds that they had been 'helpless and ignorant actors under the guidance and instigation of those whose word they have been ever taught to regard as almost their only rule of life and conduct'.[77] The effort of the tribal *muttadars* in 1858 was to restore the Bhupathi family to the throne of the Golgonda *zamindari* and get back the rights and privileges that had been undermined by the colonisation of the region. However, like their first attempt a decade previously (1845–48), this effort also failed.

Conclusion

As we have seen, colonial expansion in the Andhra region had faced resistance. The dispossession of the landed sections had indeed complicated matters for the British. This bred discontent and animosity among a large section of the landed *zamindars*, as well as some tribal chiefs who also lost out on their traditional rights and privileges. These factors led to revolts of the *zamindars* and rajas, some of whom had a substantial tribal following. Nevertheless, the tribal revolts had proved to be a major stumbling block against colonial expansion. The British had failed to suppress the revolts that took place in the Rumpa area (Godavari district) and the Gudem tribal area (Vizagapatnam district) during 1839–48 and 1845–48, respectively, because of the pestilential climate and rugged terrain. Peace was restored there only through conciliatory measures. Nevertheless, the anger and discontent lay submerged and exploded during the 1857 Rebellion.

By the time of the 1857 Uprising, the *zamindars* of the plains seem to have been largely passive. Besides, experiencing the brutal suppression of some of the earlier revolts, this passivity also needs perhaps to be located as a fall-out of their acceptance of colonial hegemony. However, the case of the tribal areas of Andhra was different. Thus, the fear psychosis that seems to have affected the feudal elite of the plains seems to have been almost absent in the tribal areas of Andhra. In fact, the 1857 Uprising in the Andhra region needs

to be situated in this context. What needs to be mentioned is that it did affect the sepoys in the Andhra region, but its broad social basis cannot go unnoticed in the context of what has been delineated in this chapter. Thus, during the 1857 Uprising, the tribals were up in arms to achieve their cherished goals, which included the restoration of traditional rights.

The sudden political developments in north India provided an opportunity, and one witnesses a period of political turmoil in the hills. The leaders showed extraordinary acumen in planning and executing the rebellions, especially when it came to the way in which these movements were timed. As we have seen, these anti-colonial movements attempted to restore the order that had been undermined with the advent of Company rule. Thus, the intention of Subba Reddy was to revive the abolished transit tax on the River Godavari and acquire possession of Nagavaram either by force or with the help of Nana Saheb. Similarly, the aim of the Gudem rebels was ostensibly to restore the Bhupathi family to power in Golgonda by driving away the British. What cannot be missed is that, along with the sepoys, one witnesses an attempt by the tribal folk to associate their actions with the broader struggle and interact with it. Thus, these two movements that we have examined illustrate how the 1857 Uprising affected the Andhra region, especially in the hill tracts, where the tribal movements expressed existing anti-colonial anger.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 Venkatarangaiya (1965: 59).
2 See for example, *Social Scientist*, 26 (1–4), 1998; *Economic and Political Weekly*, 12 May 2007; Bhattacharya (2007); thus, there is not even a stray reference to the tribal revolts that took place in the Andhra region during this phase.
3 The state of Andhra Pradesh consists of two politico-geographical areas: Andhra and Telangana. The Andhra region was under British colonial rule, whereas the Telangana area was under the Nizam rulers. This chapter focuses on the Andhra region, which included the erstwhile Northern Circars and the Ceded Districts (Rayalaseema).
4 In the Madras presidency, the first recorded sepoy rising took place in 1775 at Trichinopoly. For details, see Hill (1913: 496–503).
5 This mutiny lasted for five days, during which time three English army personnel were killed and several, including J.J. Casamajor, taken prisoner. The mutineers joined Hyder Ali's forces and were finally suppressed and the rebel leader executed. For more details, see Kesavanarayana (1990: 181–85).
6 Mackenzie (1883: 96).
7 For more details of the mutiny, see Kesavanarayana (1991: 169–73).
8 Letter from officer commanding, Vizianagaram, to the deputy adjutant general dated 28 February 1857 in Document No. 16 in Venkatarangaiya (1965: 141–43).

9 Letter from officer commanding, Vizianagaram, to the deputy adjutant general dated 28 February 1857 in Document No. 16 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
10 Letter from the adjutant general to officer commanding dated 6 March 1857 in Document No. 16 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
11 Letter from brigadier commanding, Masulipatam, to the officiating deputy assistant adjutant general dated 11 July 1857 in Document Nos 30 and 42 in Venkatarangaiya (1965). Masulipatam, along with Northern Circars, had been ceded to the British in 1766.
12 Later, Shaik Peer Shah was imprisoned and sentenced to ten years imprisonment with hard labour; letter from the commissioner of the Zilla of Cuddapah to acting chief secretary dated 1 October 1857, Document No. 29 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
13 Both these leaders were caught and sentenced to transportation for life in the Andamans; Moulvi Allauddin died in the Andamans. However, Turabaz Khan escaped before being transported. After his re-arrest, he was shot dead and his body publicly hanged at Hyderabad. For details, see Vaidya (1956: 44–83).
14 Document Nos 23 and 42 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
15 Letter from officer commanding, Northern Division, to the adjutant general dated 19 August 1857 in Document No. 31 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
16 F.B. Molony, acting head assistant to the magistrate of Rajahmundry to acting chief secretary dated 22 August 1857. See Document No. 25 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
17 Extract from the minutes of consultation for 3 September 1857, Document No. 17 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
18 Document Nos 21 and 42 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
19 Document Nos 24, 26, 27 and 28 in Venkatarangaiya (1965).
20 For details about the Konda Reddy tribe, see Von Furer-Haimendorf (1945).
21 Korukonda Subba Reddy engaged in lawless proceedings against the British in 1836–37. See Case No. 5 of 1858, No. 67–68, Fort St. George Judicial Consultations (henceforth Judicial Consultations), 24 August 1858. See also magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 17 November 1857, No. 38–39, Judicial Consultations, 1 December 1857. All the archival sources used in this chapter are drawn from the Tamilnadu State Archives, Egmore, Chennai (Madras) unless otherwise specified.
22 Collector, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 12 August 1858, Appendix 8-A in Government Order No. 109, Judicial Consultations, 16 January 1880. It was alleged that a *patta* (title deed) was granted by a former *zamindar* to the ancestors of Korukonda Subba Reddy and Rama Reddy authorizing the levy of such fees on condition of preserving the peace of the country.
23 In 1852, the collection was estimated at 2354 rupees, i.e. a moiety of 1777 rupees. The income was fairly high for a petty hill chief.
24 Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 17 November 1857, No. 38–39, Judicial Consultations, 1 December 1857. In the official records, Nagavaram is variously reported as a *zamindari* or a *mutta* (administrative unit), comprising ten to twelve villages.
25 Case No. 7 of 1858, No. 36–37, Judicial Consultations, 21 September 1858.
26 Morris (1878: 299).
27 For details about rumour and its role in revolts, see Guha (1983: 251–77).
28 It was rumoured in Salem town of Tamilnadu that the patriotic army would be marching down to the area soon. On the evening of Saturday, 1 August 1857, a crowd consisting of a large number of weavers assembled saying that the Indian soldiers would soon be coming and that the British flag would be taken down; for details, see Rajendran (2007b).
29 For more details about the Koya tribe, see Cain (1876, 1879, 1887–1888).

30 Case No. 9 of 1858, No. 67–68, Judicial Consultations, 24 August 1858; No. 19–20, Judicial Consultations, 20 October 1858.
31 Deposition of Mohamed Sahib, Case No. 1 of 1858 on 27 November, No. 39–40, Judicial Consultations, 8 January 1858.
32 Hudson, commanding detachment of 7th and 9th Regiments, 'native' infantry, to deputy assistant quarter master general dated 14 October 1857, No. 4143, Fort St George Military Department Consultations (henceforth Military Consultations), 20 November 1857.
33 Memorandum of Purvis, magistrate, Rajahmundry, No. 39–40, Judicial Consultations, 8 January 1858; No. 1–2, Judicial Consultations, 10 November 1857.
34 Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 17 November 1857, No. 38–39, Judicial Consultations, 1 December 1857.
35 Hudson, commanding detachment of 7th and 9th Regiments, 'native' infantry, to deputy quarter master general dated 24 October 1857, No. 4143, Military Consultations, 20 November 1857.
36 The rewards announced were 500 rupees for Korukonda Subba Reddy and Korla Venkata Subba Reddy; 300 rupees for Korukonda Munga Reddy and Korla Sitaramaiah; 200 rupees for Chintapalli Dasi Reddy and Korla Singi Reddy; 100 rupees for Korla Raja Reddy, Dundangy Veera Reddy, Pallala Ramaiah and Gobbalampati Rami Reddy. Extracts from the Proceedings of Foujdari Adalat dated 20 October 1857, No. 77–79, Judicial Consultations, 12 March 1858; Case No. 4 of 1858, No. 32–33, Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1858.
37 Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 24 February 1858, No. 77–79, Judicial Consultations, 12 March 1858.
38 Deposition of Veera Reddy, Case No. 4 of 1858, No. 32–33, Judicial Consultations, 20 July 1858; and Judicial Consultations 39–40, 8 January 1858
39 Case No. 8 of 1858, No. 67–68, Judicial Consultations, 24 August 1858.
40 Case No. 10 of 1858, No. 67–68, Judicial Consultations, 24 August 1858.
41 Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 30 April 1858, No. 9–10, Judicial Consultations, 18 May 1858.
42 Magistrate, Rajahmundry, to chief secretary dated 30 April 1858, No. 9–10, Judicial Consultations, 18 May 1858.
43 Dasi Reddy was a rebel leader on whose head had a reward of 200 rupees was announced. Later, he offered his aid in the seizure of the ringleaders at the cost of his pardon. No. 18–19, Judicial Consultations, 14 December 1858. Case No. 5 of 1858, No. 67–68, Judicial Consultations, 24 August 1858.
44 Thus, Kocherlakota Ramabrahmam, Pallala Ramaiah, Veera Reddy, Korukonda Potti Reddy and Tummi Reddy were sentenced to transportation for life to the Andamans. Paidaiah and Gobbalampaty Rama Reddy were given fourteen years' imprisonment. Korukonda Subba Reddy, Guruguntla Kommi Reddy, Korla Sitharamaiah, Korukonda Tummi Reddy and Korla Venkata Subba Reddy were awarded death sentences (for their role in some murders). Morris (1878: 301) states that eight persons were 'sentenced to suffer capital punishment by the Sessions Judge', and the same information is reiterated by Hemingway (1915: 36); the available archival records are silent on the details of the remaining three.
45 Hemingway (1915: 283).
46 Francis (1907: 313, 319) refers to two such incidents. After the execution of Payaka Rao, the ringleader of the 1832–34 revolt, his body was suspended likewise. Forty years later, his skull and a bone or two still remained, and the spot went by the suggestive name among the villagers as 'Payaka Rao's slip-knot post'. Similarly, Asi Dora's body was suspended in an iron cage from the gallows where he was hanged in 1840.
47 The region was known as Gudem Hills or Gudem area after its chief village, Gudem. Gudem is a small village, 43 miles north-west of Narasapatnam in the Golgonda hills, and 2580 feet above sea level. It had 501 inhabitants as per the 1901

Census. The remains of a ruined fort were noticed in the village, which signifies the importance of the place in the past; see Francis (1907: 252).

48 The hill portions of Golgonda *zamindari* were divided into *muttas* (a group of villages), and their holders were called *muttadars*. A *mutta* was the subdivision of a district, a large estate including several villages (Wilson 1855: 359). The average size of a *mutta* was ten to twelve villages.

49 Anjaneyulu (1982: 186); Francis (1907: 249).

50 The word *fituri* has a Hindustani origin. During my field work in the area in 1991–93, I observed that the common people did not differentiate the word *fituri* from revolt.

51 Arnold (1982: 105).

52 Agent to chief secretary, dated 26 June 1846, No. 7–8, Judicial Consultations, 4 August 1846.

53 Carmichael (1869: 257).

54 No. 151–52, Military Consultations, 17 February 1846.

55 Agent to brigadier general, dated 15 December 1847, No. 139–40, Military Consultations, 24 December 1847.

56 Agent to chief secretary, dated 17 November 1849, No. 18–19, Judicial Consultations, 29 January 1850; for a brief account of the revolt, see Mangamma (1987: 11–13).

57 For details, see No. 22–23, Fort St George Revenue Consultations, 12 August 1859; No. 24–25, Fort St George Judicial Proceedings, 24 March 1860.

58 Defence of first prisoner, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

59 The other leaders included were Sagina Somanna Padal, Krishna Bhupathi, Kakarlapudi Jagannadha Raju alias Payaka Rao, Thuggi Sanyasi Dora, Purjari Appan Dora, Thoory Pentadu, Sagina Laxman Padal, Madepala Chinnappa Padal, Beena Bhupathi, etc. Remarks on the sentences delivered on 8 December 1858, Nos 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

60 Three villages (including Manyapu Vurutla) of the Vizagapatnam district were assigned to the Bhupathi family in lieu of payment of allowance.

61 Remarks on the sentences delivered on 8 December 1858, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

62 Agent, Vizagapatam, to chief secretary, dated 24 August 1858, No. 14–15, Judicial Consultations, 7 September 1858.

63 Remarks on the sentences delivered on 8th December 1858, No.21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22nd February 1859.

64 Captain Owen, commanding Golgonda Sibbandy Corps, to agent, Vizagapatam, dated 26 May 1858, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

65 Agent, Vizagapatam, to chief secretary, dated 12 January 1859, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

66 Agent, Vizagapatam, to chief secretary, dated 24 May 1858, No. 14–15, Judicial Consultations, 7 September 1858.

67 Remarks and sentences in the trial for rebellion on 8 December 1858, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

68 Agent, Vizagapatam, to chief secretary, dated 24 August 1858, No. 14–15, Judicial Consultations, 7 September 1858.

69 A reward of 500 rupees each was proclaimed for the apprehension of fourteen rebels; agent, Vizagapatam, to chief secretary, dated 24 August 1858, No. 14–15, Judicial Consultations, 7 September 1858.

70 Remarks and sentences in the trial for rebellion, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

71 For this help, the sons of the late Thuggi Walasaiah Dhora of Lotugadda were reinstated in their village, which had been forcibly taken possession of by the sons of the late Thuggee Viraiah Dora. C.W. Reade, agent to the governor, issued orders to that effect. Letter from Captain Owen to C.W. Reade, 26 May 1858, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

72 Sagina Somanna Padal, Thuggi Rajan Dora, Thuggi Sarabhan Dora and Sagina Laxman Padal.
73 Thuggi Sanyasi Dora, Bonangi Krishna Padal, Muttadam Iyapu Dora and Pujari Appan Dora.
74 Panasala Bennaiah Padal was sentenced to four years' imprisonment. Punda Oopiah and Thoory Pentadu were sentenced to two years' imprisonment each.
75 Defence of Chinna Bhupathi, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.
76 Later, Chinna Bhupathi petitioned the government of Madras against the sentence passed on him. Considering the petition, the government ordered the release of Chinna Bhupathi and others by applying Her Majesty's Act of Amnesty and also ordered that the properties of the rebels were to be exempted from confiscation. The government also ordered that both Sanyasi Bhupathi and Chinna Bhupathi be made 'state prisoners', that their *mokhasa* (rent-free) lands should be held under attachment and the proceeds be paid to them for their support during their life time, and that on their death, the lands should be released from attachment and be made over to their heirs. Order No. 1701, dated 21 December 1859, No. 3–8, Judicial Consultations, 21 December 1859; Order No. 364, No. 24–25, Judicial Proceedings, dated 24 March 1860.
77 Remarks and sentences in the trial for rebellion, No. 21–22, Judicial Consultations, 22 February 1859.

6 Contested sites

The prison, penal laws and the 1857 Revolt

Madhurima Sen

More than 150 years after 1857, the Rebellion still remains as a defining event in public memory, perhaps because it was the mightiest challenge faced by British colonialism over the nineteenth century. A lot of controversy and debate has been generated by the rather famous 'greased cartridges' and the way these were perceived as an attempt to undermine the religious and social identities of Hindu and Muslim sepoys. However, historians have yet to take into account the prisons and the world of the prisoners and their anger vis-à-vis certain prison 'orders' that interfered with their religious, social and cultural identities. Although the language of opposition was articulated in terms of religion, one should not lose sight of some serious grievances that these 'orders' entailed. After all, the colonial prison was 'a captive domain, in which discipline appeared to reign supreme'[1] and where the administrators were often confronted with episodes of resistance by the convicts. As will be seen, the denial of certain kinds of religious emblems or practices in the prisons increasingly became a source of friction between the prison authorities and the jail inmates. This site of conflict should not be overlooked while exploring the explosive aspects of the 1857 Rebellion, especially when it comes to features such as jail-breaks in some parts of colonial eastern India. The rescue of the *sowars* (sepoys on horses) in Meerut was followed by the wholesale liberation of prisoners and the destruction of jails in Kanpur, Allahabad, Punjab, etc. In the Bengal presidency, the rebels broke open at least seven jails, which included Gaya, Shahabad, Hazaribagh, Chittagong, Mymensingh and Puruliya.[2]

Some research undertaken in this direction has undoubtedly played a crucial role in shaping my approach to the subject.[3] Consequently, this chapter explores and integrates incidents of penal 'disturbances' and popular grievances in the prisons, including the manner in which colonial discourse on the (Indian) caste system was manipulated vis-à-vis the prison and its inmates. This chapter examines three incidents of 'disturbances' in the prisons of eastern India, which invoked the complex world of identity and religion. As argued, these aspects contributed to make the 1857 Rebellion explosive when we consider aspects such as jail-breaks that converged with it.

Before proceeding any further, it needs to be pointed out that, in the context of the pre-1850s, India was still – culturally speaking – a largely unknown

land to Europeans. In fact, certain aspects such as caste had always been a source of confusion for the rulers. At the same time, one needs to stress the fact that British knowledge of Indians arose from the simple aim of domination by a colonial power. When faced with any challenge, they observed every aspect that was a major point of tension and conflict among the indigenous population and sought to incorporate this knowledge into their framework of domination. In such a context, religion seemed to be the primary sign of 'indigenous consciousness', which left its imprint on every field of people's life. Therefore, it was imperative that British officials spent time writing copious pages and analysing aspects of prison/popular protest and sought the opinion of educated Indians in the renewed debate over India's social customs.

'Disorder' in the prisons

The earliest sign of disquiet among convicts is visible in the jails of Bihar after the introduction of a compulsory messing system for the prisoners.[4] Until the 1840s, prisoners in the Bengal presidency had been allowed to purchase and prepare food for themselves and given a money dole to buy their own food and a place to cook in the prison yard. This enabled them to follow their caste codes and also relieved the tedium of prison life. But in 1838, it appeared to the members of the Prison Discipline Committee that the prisoners were kept better and with greater comfort than the agricultural labourers. This view was further corroborated by the fact that it was usual for a prisoner to bribe his guards by saving money from his daily allowances.[5] The colonial fear was that the prison was never a serious deterrent. In fact, compared with the general populace, the convict seemed to be in a much better situation, especially when it came to lodging, clothing and food.

On the recommendations of the Prison Discipline Committee, the money allowance was replaced with a daily ration system and, finally, in 1843, with two cooked meals daily.[6] The new policy vis-à-vis the prison inmates took adequate care to exclude anything that could constitute an item of unaccustomed luxury for the labouring poor. Hence, at the time of a general review of the convicts' diet, it was decided to supply them only with the coarse grain on which the mass of the people of that district lived. The result was disastrous in subsequent years with a higher rate of mortality.[7] As can be expected, the non-food meal supplied to the prisoners caused malnutrition, intestinal distress and had a deadly effect on the prisoners.

The quality of the Indian prisoners' diet can be judged from the fact that whereas the government spent four *annas* per head daily on an ordinary European's diet in jail, an Indian prisoner's diet did not cost more than one *anna* per head. The European prisoners were never treated under the same law as the Indian convicts and, although they had committed crimes such as murder or dacoity, they maintained their privileged status even in confinement.[8] These details perhaps illustrate the level of disaffection among the non-European prisoners because they were based on racial discrimination

that ensured the reduction of the diet of their Indian counterparts. Alongside, the messing system itself encountered strong convict resistance and evasion. This was especially because they considered the introduction of such measures as a real threat to their caste, which was an essential part of the religious and social identity of the Hindu prisoners. This conflict over messing was not an isolated episode. In fact, one comes across a number of occasions when prisoners showed their insubordination towards the jail authorities, with the prison emerging as a major site of wider defiance against colonial rule.

Another source of trouble manifested itself among Hindu prisoners after the circulation of the 'government order' (on 26 April 1855) by the inspector of jails, Lower Provinces, Mr Loch. This 'order' called for the introduction of earthen drinking pots in prisons in place of metal *lotah* (a small vessel for drinking/storing water).[9] In the context of the belief systems of the Hindus, metal vessels made of gold, silver or iron could be purified by water or ashes. Nevertheless, earthen vessels were considered impure after one use and could not be used for a second time. Fuelled by reports that the substitution of earthen drinking vessels for brass *lotah* was an attempt to break caste and make forced conversions to Christianity, a level of determined resistance developed in several jails, notably in Tirhoot and Arrah jail.[10] However, if viewed beyond caste, one can clearly see how it was rather convenient to use the *lotah* in prisons. Thus, unlike an earthen vessel, it could be used for drawing water from the prison well. Besides, a *lotah* could hold enough water for drinking several times. This enabled a prisoner to have a constant supply of water for the night in the terrible heat of his closed ward – something almost indispensable in the climatic conditions of India. Further, if a prisoner was sent out to work at construction sites making roads, or elsewhere, he could carry in his *lotah* a plentiful supply of water for his daily needs. Consequently, although expressed in a religious form that seems to have annoyed the Hindu prisoners, one can clearly feel the inconvenience caused through the introduction of the earthen pots.

On another occasion, the Muslim convicts showed their unwillingness to obey the circular (2 October 1856) of the inspector of jails enforcing an order that 'among the labouring prisoners, the heads and faces of the Hindus should be shaved, the heads of the Muslims shaved and their beard cut with scissor'.[11] This was yet another example of failure of the administrators to take the belief systems of the inmates seriously. The Muslim population in the jail raised strong opposition at the compulsory trimming of the beard which was strictly prohibited in their religion. The prisoners of Mymensing jail were so displeased with this 'beard-cutting' order that they refused to take their meal until they were assured of its withdrawal. The secretary, *Unjomun-i-Islamee*, a body aimed to preserve Islam from 'alien' influences, came forward to speak on behalf of the prisoners.[12] For the Hindus, the shaving of one's head indicated a state of mourning when someone lost their parents. The convicts of the pre-1857 era, however, never showed such confidence to resist the corruption or cruelties inflicted upon them inside the jail wall. They could suffer

and survive in a condition of semi-starvation without showing any open defiance against such injustice.[13] After all, criticisms about the prisons in the public sphere were made only from the 1890s, when the middle-class nationalists found themselves confined as 'political prisoners'.[14]

The introduction of the new messing system or earthen drinking vessels in jails or the shaving of the heads and trimming of the beards of the jail inmates may be regarded as efforts on the part of the government to introduce a more orderly and effective prison regime by preventing obvious irregularities. Ostensibly for the purpose of more convenient administration and the idea of economising on expenditure, the practice of disallowing each prisoner to prepare his own food was discontinued in favour of communal cooking by Brahmin and Muslim cooks. Similarly, if viewed from the side of the colonial administration, one can perhaps see the logic behind some of these changes. Thus, the idea of discipline and cleanliness was behind the idea of making Muslim prisoners shave off their beards, and the idea of preventing prisoners from using the brass *lotahs* as a weapon saw the introduction of earthenware drinking vessels. Alongside, the idea of disciplining and punishing the prisoners dictated the policy of taking away their *lotahs*, *thalees*, with the idea of denying them comforts that they enjoyed in their homes.[15]

In fact, the idea of banning the metal *lotahs* inside jails can be traced to a murderous attack on the superintendent of the Alipore jail, Mr Richardson, with a prisoner's *lotah* in 1834.[16] Perhaps this incident made the inspector of jails identify the metal drinking pot as a dangerous weapon and issue the order in April 1855 for the confiscation of all unauthorised possessions from prisoners (including the metal drinking pots). It was indeed remarkable that, although the prisoners were rebellious and insubordinate on the point of their *lotahs*, the same order disallowing tobacco was carried into effect without any problems. Although the deprivation of tobacco was acutely felt by the prisoners, they never thought of resisting it, perhaps because it did not affect or interfere with their life, identity and feelings. Neither did it ever occur to the people outside the jails to entertain any sympathy with prisoners in respect of such a deprivation.[17] However Loch's order, while its professed object was to deprive the prisoners of prohibited and objectionable articles, deprived them of an article that not only had never been prohibited but had always been openly allowed to prisoners. Its sudden prohibition, without careful previous explanation of the purpose, created great excitement and caused apprehensions related to the colonial government's attempts to meddle with caste.

Discontinuing the brass *lotah* had other implications as well. It was well known that a Hindu was accustomed to use brass *lotahs*, as brass was considered susceptible to constant purification and therefore suitable for constant use for all purposes without injury to caste. This was not so in the case of earthen vessels, which could not be used even to drink water twice. Again, with reference to the objection to *lotahs* as dangerous weapons, it may be said that, if the prisoners intended to create a 'disturbance', they could find many a weapon at hand. If inclined to commit an assault, labouring prisoners

always had access to materials. Moreover, even in the Alipore jail, the substitution of brass cups for brass *lotahs* had not prevented the murderous attacks in jails.[18] After all, prisoners did have brass cups in their possession (only in selected jails) and also had access to pickaxes, shovels, hoes and even firewood used for cooking, which could be used for similar purposes.

Coming to the messing system, it needs to be mentioned that it was introduced with the determination of making a prison sentence a 'deterrent' and making the jail a more disciplined place. Perhaps this also meant ignoring caste sensibilities about the preparation and consumption of food deliberately. Again, the order regarding the trimming of beards or shaving the heads of the prison inmates was meant to be a general measure of discipline. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, this was considered to be direct interference by the government with the religious identities of both Muslims and Hindus. Such episodes most certainly illustrate the authorities' difficulty in exercising effective disciplinary control over prisoners and how these could spill over into neighbouring communities and attract sympathy from outside. The general perception was that the British deliberately offended their religious feelings and that of the wider community.

In all three cases, townspeople sided with the prisoners, and parties outside the walls of the jail joined the cry. There was a general feeling that the government was seeking in various ways to entrap them into a loss of caste and religion for purposes of its own. Here, we may refer to the contemporary accounts of Shaik Hedayat Ali, *Subadar* and *Sirdar Bahadur* in the Bengal Police Battalion. He faithfully represented the actual resentments felt by the mass of the people. In his detailed narratives, he says

> people of Hindustan are proverbially foolish on the score of religion, and deem no religion equal to their own. They are averse to novelty, they only stick to the customs and manners of their forefathers, any deviation from that they think must spoil their caste. They even do not follow their religious commands, but only the customs of their ancestors. It is well known fact that the Hindoos think what their forefathers have done as constituting their religion, any digressions from which they construe into irreligion.

It was the feeling of the common people, he quoted

> when any of our brethren commits an offence, he gets punished according to the law of the land; this is all right and proper, for it is just that every one should receive punishment adequate to his offence; but indeed it is very objectionable to us that every one's caste is taken away. For instance when a person is sentenced to imprisonment, his beard and moustaches are cut. This is very grievous to us and causes great injury to our religion. Besides in jails the prisoners are ordered to eat in messes, the Mahomedans by themselves and the Hindoos by themselves; this is no outrage to

> a Mahomedan, but it is a great one to the feelings and religion of a Hindoo. One Hindoo won't eat from the hand of another unless they happen to be brothers or cousins. … There are Tewarees, Dhobies, Choubies, Paundes, Opadiahs, Sookhuls, Baghpais etc. none of these, though all Brahmins, will eat from each other's hands, that is, won't eat what the other cooks. On account of these prison arrangements it was the general opinion that the Government wished to do away with all caste. When any Hindoo is released from prison he is always tabooed by his family and looked upon as having lost caste: on this account both the prisoner and his relatives become disaffected towards the Government.

Although written by a military officer of the English with pro-British sympathies, these narratives are nevertheless records of the varied personal experiences of a man who had the opportunity to mix with different sections of the people in India and to know their feelings.[19]

It was certainly a matter of gross carelessness on the part of the government that caution and forethought were not exercised while framing the jail rules, keeping in mind the cultural and social practices of the inmates. In fact, like many other factors, it was their misunderstanding of Indian social and cultural mores that together contributed to the failure of the British in anticipating the Rebellion of 1857. This needs to be historicised in the context of the transformation of the English from suppliant merchants to a colonial ruling class. This created a level of isolation associated with an exclusive community, which was charged with a sense of racial superiority. In fact, it was the combination of racial prejudice and ignorance that excluded Europeans from many areas of Indian social life – a sentiment that had been expressed on an earlier occasion.[20] This was perhaps why some individual officers had clearly sensed the necessity of the involvement of Indians and their co-operation in jail management. As F.J. Mouat, the inspector of jails of the Lower Provinces, expressed in a letter to the editor of *Someprokash*: 'I should sincerely rejoice if you and other educated and enlightened native gentlemen would take an active personal interest in the management of prison. … you all possess sources of information regarding the habits, feeling and inner life of your countrymen, that are a sealed book to the European'.[21]

The order about the earthen *lotahs* was considered sacrilegious. The earthen vessels became *jhuta* (polluted) after one use and, as it involved a considerable outlay, the daily renewal of such vessels in jail was not really possible. The colonial administration was not only responsible for a policy they initiated, but also the manner in which it dealt with subsequent events. Mr Loch apparently lost sight of some basic questions – whether the use of brass *lotah* was essential to practices involving caste, and whether the taking away of the *lotahs* and enforcing the use of earthen vessels in their stead was looked upon as an infringement of caste. Confused on this point, the government invited the opinion of the district magistrates, and a succession of adverse reports were received about the case. The magistrates generally

disapproved of the idea of the substitution of earthen pots for *lotahs* as it unnecessarily offended the Hindu prisoners.[22]

It was, however, not the received idea that such an article had to be made of brass. Thus, in some of the Bihar districts, because of the frequent theft of *lotahs* and the quarrels that took place among the prisoners, the use of *toomras* or *tombas* (dried gourd shells) was substituted for the metal *lotahs*, and these have continued to be used by all classes of prisoners since 1853. Besides being cheap, these were tolerably durable and not convertible into 'weapons of offence'. Like *tombas*, coconut, pumpkin shell or hollow bamboos could also be introduced as an unobjectionable substitute. Similarly, there was also no disturbance or objection when the Alipore convicts were disarmed in 1834. The use of *lotahs* had been entirely discontinued in the Alipore jail ever since 1834 when the superintendent Mr Richardson was murdered. After this, a small *kutorah* or brass cup weighing six *chuttack* was allowed to each prisoner. When new convicts arrived at the Alipore jail, their *lotahs* were invariably taken away at the gate. In the case of 'term prisoners' (who were not meant for transportation), their *lotahs* were sold and *kutorahs* purchased with the proceeds. If those prisoners had no *lotahs* or other means of paying for *kutorahs*, they were supplied from the jail store. The advantage of the *kutorah* was that it had no neck to which a cloth or string could be fastened, as was done with the *lotah* in order to convert it into an 'offensive weapon'. Thus, the prisoners in Alipore jail used brass *kutorahs.* If some new convicts were to be transported, they did not receive the *kutorah*, and each man was supplied with two earthen vessels (*bhars*; one for use in the privy and the other for drinking purposes), which were used until they broke. No Hindu convict in Alipore jail had ever objected to this on the grounds of caste. At least there were no overt signs of disturbance based on this issue.[23]

The prison during the Rebellion of 1857

In the context of the 1857 Rebellion, everything out of the ordinary was viewed with suspicion by the colonial authorities.[24] After all, the prison was not an isolated or autonomous enclave that remained unaffected by anti-colonial anger and the opposition associated with what was undoubtedly the most powerful opposition British colonialism had faced over the nineteenth century. In fact, although the prison 'orders' had a legal origin and aimed at disciplining the convict and achieve greater uniformity, they were misunderstood or even misinterpreted in a context wherein they were incorrectly explained to the prisoners. The initial apprehension gradually turned into fierce antipathy, ultimately leading to a kind of alienation. This was primarily because such measures were perceived as a direct challenge to the religious and social identity of both Hindus and Muslims and sparked off protest not only in jail, but in the outer world too, as they reinforced fears of forcible conversion to Christianity. In fact, religion filled an ideological vacuum in the absence of territorial patriotism and a fully developed concept of Indian

nationalism among the people.[25] In this sense, what appeared to be 'onslaughts' on their religion, indigenous customs and social identity united the Hindus and Muslims in 1857.[26] Consequently, it was not mere coincidence that anger and prison protests, jail 'disturbances' and prison-breaks converged with the 1857 Rebellion.

Despite the evident loss of prestige in all three incidents of convict agitation described earlier, the government had to compromise either by withholding its order or by making some additional alteration to the existing order so that the intention of the government might not be misunderstood. In the *lotah* case, the drinking vessels (*lotahs*) that were taken away from the prisoners were all restored afterwards.[27] Regarding the trimming of beards of the jail inmates, it added 'those classes to whom such a measure is offensive on religious ground were specially exempted from its operation'.[28] In the messing system, they confirmed a Brahmin cook for the Hindu prisoners and a Muslim cook for the Mohammedan convicts. Even the kitchen and cooking vessels of these two communities were kept separately, wherever possible. Although officially this had no place in the colonial prison system, the colonial administration found it politically expedient to recognise the importance of caste and associated religious structures associated with the prisoners. In fact, this led the colonial authorities to follow caste hierarchies inside jails, which in turn implied that the barber, washer-man and sweeper were expected to perform their customary 'caste occupations'. This co-existed with care being taken to ensure that no such work was assigned to Hindu prisoners, who found it objectionable on grounds of caste.[29] Being seriously challenged by the Rebellion of 1857, the colonial government did not like to take any risk of disregarding perceptions that were based on caste, even if these were inconsistent with proper jail management. Consequently, the Rebellion of 1857 saw the colonial government retreating, and the colonial prison actually reinforcing caste hierarchies.

The reordering of the penal system

After crushing the 1857 Rebellion, the colonial government drew upon some aspects of caste to restructure the penal system. This seems particularly striking if viewed in the context of what we have seen inside the prisons. Here, one needs especially to highlight Act XVII of 1857 passed by the Legislative Council of India. While outlining the penal structure, when it came to mutiny or sedition of soldiers and officers, this act clearly included death sentences and transportation for life as forms of punishment.[30] It is indeed surprising that, although the colonial administration was on the backfoot and tended to accept caste as an essential part of a Hindu's religion and social identity that had to be respected, even inside the prison, the logic of the penal transportation policy remained untainted by it. In fact, a conscious policy was to draw upon caste and religion as weapons to maximise terror and pain, rather openly. This is particularly clear when it comes to penal transportations for

life. Transportation became a weapon of tremendous power in view of what is sometimes referred to as the 'Hindu antipathy' to crossing the Kalapani ('black water'), whereby a prisoner faced excommunication from the community in a general sense.[31] The Indians found this particularly severe because it involved banishment to a far-off place across the ocean, which implied absolute ostracism from their caste and religion forever. It also meant disinheritance because, according to Brahminical law, no outcast could inherit property.[32] This dreadful aspect seems to have been particularly attractive and incorporated into the penal system by the colonial authorities to maintain 'law and order'.

Whereas one can see the *lotah* episode or the beard-trimming order being born out of ignorance, the colonial authorities had sought to rectify the situation, even taking into consideration the opinion of 'respectable' Indians. Armed with the resources of knowledge and challenged by the 1857 Rebellion, such insensitive measures with a clear political agenda were imposed in a planned way this time round. This drive drew upon the British construction of the Indian caste system. Thus, what can be seen is that, in the first phase, the prison had served the colonial administration as a source for acquiring knowledge about Indian society. However, stung by the 1857 Rebellion, one witnesses the inauguration of an effort to exercise power as well as renegotiate Indian society. This can be perhaps located as a sort of social communication with the indigenous population at the time of 'disturbances'.[33] After all, by the 1850s, the government was well aware from their past experiences that violation of caste sensibilities and religious conventions could inflict an additional punishment beyond that decreed by the court and heighten the punitive effect. Another closely related measure was to punish unruly women by cutting off their hair, thus rendering their imprisonment as a kind of institutional widowhood.[34]

For a period of over sixty years from 1858, when the penal settlement was re-established at Port Blair, prisoners sentenced to transportation were regularly sent to the settlement. Bentham, in his *Principle of Penal Law*, said that the system in any case lacked all the elements of a good penal system and had every element that a system should not have. England, where this idea of transportation originated, had abolished this system. But British India still retained that relic of an exploded idea of ancient penology. One of the advantages of transporting convicts from the colonial viewpoint was that it provided a cheap and fairly disciplined workforce in places where it was hard to obtain one locally. In spite of the failure of its first attempt during the second half of the eighteenth century, the colonial government revived the Andaman settlement in 1858 at the cost of the lives of Indians. Its principal object was deterrence to individuals and to the public that would prevent them from committing any act which the colonial government considered criminal. The colonial rulers tried to make Andamans a symbol of terror and mark it out as a place of special disadvantages. There was a deliberate vagueness in the wording of the *Andaman and Nicobar Manual* in which all the officers were invested with special power over the convicts. Despite the

requirement in the jails of India that all prisoners should wear only the prescribed uniform, special consideration was shown to the Brahmin to retain their sacred thread emblematic of their caste. But in an Andaman jail, no one was permitted to keep any religious emblems or sign. Such denial, they believed, would enhance the terror already associated with transportation.[35] The fear was so severe among the common people that not even free men were ready to go there for a job, and no amount of salary tempted them to run the risk. The most important point in the organisation of this settlement was that of family emigration and, for obvious reasons, an agency (Family Emigration Agency) would be required to locate and visit the families of the convicts in their home and assist them to reach the port of embarkation. But the superintendent of Port Blair wrote

> I have heard privately that there is no chance of either of the natives whom I appoint Family Emigration agents for Bengal and North Western Provinces, accepting the appointment because they were afraid of being deputed on some occasion to see their charges to their destitution here and no amount of salary would tempt them to run the risk.[36]

Transportation as a penal option had a high deterrent value. As it was given in lieu of the death sentence, transportation gave the Raj a merciful face, a legitimacy that it was seeking for its own justification.[37] But actually, the impact of such a sentence on the convict was greater than the effect of a sentence of death, and so in India, transportation was deliberately maintained at a time when it was losing favour in Britain.

Conclusion

British colonialism had been a continuous process of experiments adjusted and readjusted as and when required to suit the changing needs of the time. Throughout colonial rule, the colonial ruling class based its policy on a conscious abandonment of what was held to be native tradition, although it remained altogether defensive in its outlook. The East India Company had been experimenting with the administration of criminal justice since the days of Warren Hastings. The loose and tolerant attitude of Clive and Hastings, their readiness to admire and work through Indian institutions was nothing but a strategy of their own. In fact, after Plassey, the immediate problem was the manner in which the British should exercise their controlling power in the territories of Bengal. At first, they felt too inexperienced and unready to contemplate taking the government of the country into their own hands and so resorted to the expedient of a puppet Indian government. Similarly, the British attempt to reach some understanding of the nature of Indian society and religion was inseparable from the parallel effort to devise an ideology that would sustain their rule over the entire Indian subcontinent. Practical concerns fuelled their commitment to the study of Indian learning.

The first conscious movement to introduce English principles into British possession was evident in the Regulating Act of 1773, whereby they were able to convert the Indians into British subjects very easily. The ever-widening frontiers of the Company's dominion also resulted in the shutting out of Indians from all avenues of honourable employment. The administrative reform of Cornwallis, introduced at the close of the eighteenth century, meant the virtual exclusion of Indians from high posts. Their sense of superiority was galvanised by the events of 1857. The explicit hostility of the Indians and their defeat brought home to them that they were an imperial race holding the soil by dint of valour and foresight.[38]

However, the 1857 Rebellion did mark a shift in imperial ideology and policy. The Queen offered to pardon all rebels who had not taken part in the murder of Europeans, and declared that religious toleration would be observed and ancient customs respected.[39] But the attitude of the average British soldier and civilian officials towards the Indians had not undergone any fundamental change. William Howard Russell was greatly amused when he attended the ceremony at which Lord Canning read out the proclamation promising the people 'pardon, forgiveness, justice, respect to religious belief and non-annexation' to hear a sergeant who was on duty at the foot of the platform staircase call to one of the men, 'I am going away for a moment, do you stay here and take care that no nigger goes up'.[40] A harsh ignorance could be noticed among the commanding officers for the dreadful conduct of a British or European soldier towards the Indians. When a British soldier kicked a native and left him almost half dead, no one was accused. But being two minutes late for parade or failing to polish up one's cap or collar badges were considered serious offences in the army. Long after the Rebellion, when Lord Curzon introduced a new rule restricting the ill-treatment of the officers towards the 'natives', a white soldier commented 'old Curzon is no damned good; this country wants a Viceroy who will keep the bleeding natives down'.[41]

Viewing the Rebellion of the sepoys as superstitious insubordination, the British retaliated and punished them with cruelty.[42] 'Every tree and gable-end in the place should have its burden in the shape of a mutineer's carcass', wrote Ernest Jones, the Chartist leader in the *People's Paper* (on 31 October 1857), who found no justification in 'British *sepoyism*' as against the stories of '*sepoyism*' in India (i.e. of atrocities committed by the Indians in the Rebellion).[43] He raised unequivocal protest against the hysterical demands for reprisals and retribution appearing in the English mind: ' … Man own no nobler name than that of Man, no holier law than Christ's great law of Love. … no millions shrieking in a fiery flood, no blasphemies of vengeance and of blood, making the end of God's great work of joy, and of Almighty wisdom – to destroy!'[44] Thus, as can be seen, not all English people were in favour of such cruel treatment of Indians, and many raised their voices in protest. Lord Canning, the governor general, genuinely attempted to put an end to this madness and ordered the proper trial and punishment of those who were suspected of being guilty. For this, his countrymen nicknamed him in derision, 'Clemency Canning'.[45]

In their frustration over finding an exemplary punishment for the unruly subjects, caste violation began to be valued as a penal device, a new ideological tool of the empire. They knew such rudeness, although intolerable in Europe, had a rough and ready efficiency, and was well calculated for dealing with great emergencies without posing any danger to the life of a prisoner. Consequently, the colonial rulers drew upon traditional penal practices, wherein caste played an active role. The process was, however, marked by a contradiction. Thus, the British, while accommodating certain aspects of high caste status in the Indian prison, seem to have looked down on the idea of assigning caste any serious priority in the post-Rebellion era.

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Notes

1 Arnold (1994: 152).
2 Anderson (2007: 57–61).
3 Yang (1987: 29–45); see also Arnold (1994); Anderson (2007).
4 Judicial Department (Judicial Branch) Proceedings, West Bengal State Archives, hereafter Judl. (Judl.) Progs 21–28 May 1845, no. 75; 25 February 1858, no. 19; 30 September 1858, no.14.
5 *Report of the Committee on Prison Discipline* (hereafter *PDC*), Calcutta, 1838, 31–37.
6 Sen (2007: 47).
7 In fact, the 1864 Prison Committee attributed this, along with other reasons, to the insufficiency of food; Judl. (Judl.) Progs, November 1863, no. 63.
8 *PDC*, 36.
9 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 7 June 1855, no. 1.
10 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 5–12 February 1857, no. 36.
11 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 25 June 1857, no. 36.
12 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 25 June 1857, no. 36.
13 Sen (2007: 78–80).
14 Sen (2007: 163).
15 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 25 February 1858, no. 19; 30 September 1858, no. 14.
16 Judicial Department (Criminal Branch) Proceedings, West Bengal State Archives, 14 April 1834, no. 15. In this particular incident, a brass *lotah* had been used.
17 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 7 June 1855, no. 10.
18 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 5–12 February 1857, no. 36; thus, here one can refer to an attack on Mr Samuell in the Alipore jail long after the *lotahs* had been prohibited.
19 His account is based on two reports of 30 January and 7 August 1858; for details, Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 25 February 1858, no. 19; 30 September 1858, no. 14 (30 January and 7 August 1858).
20 'The Indian Penal Code', in *Calcutta Review*, 13, 1850: 170; in fact, in 1835, the members of the Law Commission stated that the systems that were being introduced were foreign and that these were introduced by conquerors who were different in race, manners, languages and religion from the great mass of the people.
21 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, January 1869, no. 14.

22 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 5–12 February 1857, no. 36.
23 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 5–12 February 1857, no. 36.
24 Buckland (1901: 36); see also Shepherd (1980: 10).
25 Roy (2003: 3–39); see also Sen (2007: 105).
26 In fact, this feeling became even stronger in the army with the introduction of the Enfield rifle. As is well known, these rifles had to be loaded with greased cartridges, the end of which had to be bitten off when they had to be used. Here, the statement of the Court of Directors of the Company is important to note; as observed, 'the mutiny conveys the warning that it is possible to have a revolution in which Brahmin and *Sudra*, Muhammedan and Hindu were united against us'; cited in R.P. Singh (2007: 54).
27 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 7 June 1855, no. 9; 5–12 February 1857, no. 36.
28 Mouat (1857: 23).
29 Mouat (1867: 13).
30 Judl. (Judl.) Progs, 25 February 1858, nos 114, 125.
31 In fact, as observed, 'Separation from caste and kin was reputedly the only punishment that a native dreads'; Home (Judl.) Progs, June 1869, no. 3.
32 Charles Ball, 'The History of the Indian Mutiny', in Pati (2007: 7).
33 Bayly (1996: 365).
34 Arnold (1994); see also Sen (2007: 51).
35 Sen (2007: ch. 5).
36 Home (Judl.) Progs, November 1858, nos 6–16.
37 Vaidik (2006).
38 Sen (2007: ch. 1).
39 Queen's Proclamation of 1 November 1858, *The Calcutta Gazette*, 1858, Calcutta.
40 William Howard Russel, 'My Diary in India', cited in Hibbert (1978: 39).
41 Frank Richards, 'Old Soldier Sahib', cited in De (2008: 226).
42 Nehru (2004: 480); see also Mackenzie (2008: 125).
43 Jones (1957[1857], Appendix II).
44 Jones (1957[1857]: 42, 44).
45 'Introduction', in *1857, A Pictorial Presentation* (1997).

7 Courtesans and the 1857 Rebellion

The role of Azeezun in Kanpur

Lata Singh

The voice of the common people has been silenced for a long time in history, although in recent times, attempts have been made to bring the common people to the forefront. Nevertheless, a significant section of women's history, especially of those on the margins, considered the 'other' woman in the construction of middle-class women, remains invisible. Having greater access to the public sphere, these women were relatively independent and not so clearly contained by caste, class, gender or by a demarcated space. Hence, they were considered 'threatening'. Bringing these women as subjects in history would unsettle the 'respectable' middle-class discourse. An important section of society that has been excluded from history are women performers. Nationalist discourses have always negated or erased their creative aspect by putting them out of the framework of the 'respectable' nation. This chapter brings to the forefront one such performing community, that of the courtesans, a section of women belonging to the singing and dancing community. Unfortunately, little remains of the writings of these women, who were considered to be the most educated women of their times.

This chapter, by looking at the role of a courtesan, Azeezun, in the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur, tries to add a significant dimension to the historiography of the 1857 Rebellion. Generally, the study of 'ordinary rebels' of the 1857 Rebellion remains focused on the participation of men. Unlike in the case of leaders such as Rani Laxmibai, the participation of ordinary women has received little attention in most discussions of the Rebellion. There is historical evidence of courtesans playing a significant role in politics, but they remain invisibilized in mainstream history.[1] By looking at the role of courtesans, this chapter questions the positions of imperialist and nationalist historiography, which have projected courtesans as 'morally loose' women.

Reclaiming the marginals from the respectable 'nation'

During the colonial period, the burgeoning middle class saw itself as the sole representative of the emerging 'nation'. It constructed the 'nation' in a highly 'idealized' version of its own image. In that construction, the 'woman' question was very central, and the category 'woman' was foregrounded and redefined.

In fact, in the narrative of the 'nation', the 'new woman' – that is to say the 'modern' woman – figured centrally. The 'new woman' was subjected to a new patriarchy, which separated her not only from the modern western woman, but also from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition. At the same time, the 'new' woman was also distinguished from her 'other', that is to say the 'common woman'. The moral degradation of the 'common woman', who was constructed as coarse, vulgar, loud and sexually promiscuous, was offset by the dignified refinement of the ideal woman.[2] Discursive formations marked women who had greater access to the public space and were relatively independent as aberrations from the 'ideal'. Thus, the 'women in the streets' were sought to be marginalized, their 'public-ness', ironically, making them invisible. The figuration of the 'performing woman' in the hegemonic discourse of respectability was, however, peculiar. While the 'common' woman's marginality emanated from her differential terms of inclusion, the 'performing woman' was excluded from middle-class hegemonic discourses, through excision. The middle class excised, erased and thereby negated the creative role of performing women in its quest for a 'respectable' nation. Women performers were kept out of the frame of the 'nation in the making'.

The representation of women and prescription of an 'ideal form' of womanhood was an important site of hegemonic contest of the nation, which would necessarily involve extensive historial changes. The representation of woman as public entertainer and the focus of male desire would not serve the interests of the English-educated elite, which put in her place the Indian equivalent of the Victorian domestic angel, the *sugrihini* or good housewife.[3] As the middle classes consolidated their position, they exercised pressure on their womenfolk to conform to what the colonizer set out as standards of ideal womanly conduct. A new kind of segregation was imposed on women, as the middle classes emphasized the need to eradicate what they were trained to believe were the pernicious influences on 'their' women of certain prevailing literary and cultural forms. These forms, which were sought to be erased, emerged primarily from the lower socio-economic groups and represented a popular culture that ran parallel to what could be called the 'official culture' articulated by the middle class.

Popular culture had a wide female audience, ranging from the lower caste and lower class self-employed women of the market places to the wives and daughters of the middle class in the sheltered *andarmahal* or *zenana* (women's quarters).The middle class considered women's popular songs, with their robust sense of humour and frank sensuality, a threat to the new ideal of domesticity, and restricted the association of elite women with female performers. They increasingly associated popular cultural forms with the 'licentious' and voluptuous tastes of the 'vulgar', and they were at pains to distance themselves from these popular cultural forms.[4] The socio-religious reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj epitomized the trend towards Puritanism. They uncompromisingly condemned gambling, going to prostitutes, smoking, drinking and the theatre.[5] Female performers came under

attack in the well-known 'Anti-Nautch' campaign that culminated in 1947, with the outlawing of temple dancing and the prohibition on dedicating women as *devadasis* (singing and dancing girls in temples) in south India.[6] Female performers were stigmatized as 'prostitutes'. The 'woman performer' was perhaps the most disquieting figure, precisely in her unsettledness – her seemingly excessive mobility in the public sphere, which disrupted the foundational moral distinction between the 'home' and the 'world'.

This chapter makes an attempt to unsettle the nationalist project by foregrounding the role of a courtesan named Azeezun, a performing woman, in the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur.[7] By bringing the figure of the courtesan centrally into the political space constituted by the nation, a space denied to her in the dominant narrative of the nation, the chapter opens up the nationalist public/political for interrogation. Although there is historical evidence of these women having played a very significant role in the politics of the period, their political voice is snuffed out in mainstream history writing, making Azeezun and other women like her invisible. Therefore, the effort of this chapter is to bring occluded voices back into history. While subaltern historians brought marginalized voices to the forefront of history, they failed to take into account women, the largest, ubiquitous and most obvious 'subaltern' group of all. Although recent attempts at rewriting history by bringing the voices of women to the forefront have been reasonably influential, a substantial segment of women's history, especially the history of marginal women, still remains invisible.

The historiography of 1857 suffers from the same excision of the 'common' woman. In most accounts, the role of the sepoys and the elite is highlighted. Although the Rebellion was initiated by eighty-five soldiers who refused to operate Enfield rifles at Meerut, the uprising went beyond the ranks of the military, encompassing a varied cross-section of the populace. Consequently, the representation of the role and participation of the ordinary rebel, the urban poor and the peasants, who resisted British rule throughout the nineteenth century and earlier, remains absent in the Rebellion. There has been an attempt to interrogate the 'received wisdom' related to the 1857 Rebellion to highlight the role of subaltern subjects in this phase. Instead of focusing on the trials and tribulations of the Indian rulers and *zamindars* alone, there has been an attempt to explore the popular base of the anti-imperialist insurgency and explore the role of the marginalized in the uprising.[8] While there are celebrations in literature of figures such as Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, who participated in the Rebellion to protect her kingdom, the participation of ordinary women has received little attention. Even Gautam Bhadra's highly informative essay on 'ordinary rebels' of the 1857 Rebellion remains focused on men. In this context, highlighting the role of the courtesan, a woman on the 'margin', becomes very significant from a historical point of view.

The courtesans have been stigmatized in nationalist and colonialist discourse. In fact, *tawaif*, the term used for courtesan, has accumulated over time moralistic, value-loaded connotations and is equated in the popular

mindset to a whore, forcing these women performers into silence. When they did speak, they had to reinvent themselves through polite myths to reinforce their self-esteem, which had been consistently battered by references to them as fallen and dangerous women. By the end of the nineteenth century, the term *tawaif* had become an impolite word not used in genteel conversation. Unfortunately, little remains of the writings of these women, considered to be the most educated women of their times. Compounding the silence of these women has been the silence of scholars, thus leaving gaping holes in social history.[9] However, there is historical evidence of courtesans playing a very significant role in politics, but their political voice is silenced in mainstream history. Moreover, the Bedia community – a traditional caste of professional singers and dancers – associates with the event of 1857 with a sense of pride.[10]

The retrieval of performing women, that is women on the margins, would provide a vantage point from which history may be reread and rewritten. This chapter makes an attempt not only to retrieve those on the margins, who were denied political agency or a presence by the colonialist project of (mis)representations, but also to bring them back into the creative domain.

Azeezun's role in Kanpur

Kanpur had been one of the important centres of the 1857 Rebellion. The rebels captured Kanpur on 5 June 1857 and proclaimed Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao, the Peshwa. The British, under Commander Hugh Wheeler, retreated to a shallow entrenchment in the cantonment area, later known in history as 'Wheeler's entrenchment', which was besieged by the rebels for almost three weeks. The English garrison surrendered in the last week of June 1857 on terms of safe passage to Allahabad from the rebel leader Nana Sahib. But when, on the morning of 27 June, the soldiers, along with the women and children, were about to embark into the boats at Sati Chaura Ghat, fighting broke out and most of the British men were killed. The rebels publicly slaughtered over 300 men, women and children of the 'master race' at the Satichaura Ghat in Kanpur. The women and children survivors were rescued and were first placed in confinement in Suvadha Kothi, but later shifted to Bibighar (house of ladies) in the cantonment magistrate's compound. But when it became clear that the relieving forces under General Havelock were nearing the city and defeat was inevitable, the captives – all women and children – were massacred and their dismembered bodies buried in the well of the compound on 15 July 1857.[11] Two days later, General Havelock reclaimed Kanpur, and Colonel James Neill decimated the rebel population. This sequence of violence has held sway over the Indian and British imaginations for generations, and historians and commentators have recounted the massacre with horror.

The colonial accounts available on the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur are those of British survivors of the 1857 Rebellion, diaries of British loyalists and deposition as part of the official report prepared by the British. One year after

the reconquest of Kanpur by the British, the British had instituted an enquiry under Lt Col. Williams to find out exactly what had happened. There were depositions collected by him. One source was that of Nanak Chand, a lawyer of Kanpur, who was loyal to the government and kept a diary throughout this period which is replete with references to Azeezun's participation. Another important source regarding Azeezun is Janakee Prasad's recorded testimonies in Lt Col. Williams' account. Janakee Prasad was a merchant in Kanpur. In the enquiry, he was asked whether he knew a prostitute, Azeezun by name. He said that Azeezun 'was very intimate with the men of the 2nd Cavalry, and was in the habit of riding armed with sowars'. He further said that the day the flag was raised, 'she was on horseback in male attire decorated with medals, armed with a brace of pistols and joined the crusade. I saw her as thousands of others did also'.[12] In Trevelyan's account, Azeezun is mentioned as 'the Demoiselle Theroigne of the Rebellion', who 'appeared on horseback amidst a group of her admirers, dressed in the uniform of her favoured regiment, armed with pistols, decorated with medals'.[13] Even the works of later nationalist writings such as V.D. Savarkar highlight Azeezun's role in the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur.[14] Savarkar describes Azeezun

> as a dancing girl very much loved by the sepoys; she was not one, however, who sold her love for money in the ordinary market, but in the field of freedom it was given as a reward for the love of country. How a delightful smile from her beautiful face encouraged fighting heroes and how a slight frown from her dark eyebrows hastily sent back to the field cowards, who had come away.[15]

Most of the accounts mention how Azeezun used to be on horseback in male attire decorated with medals, armed with a brace of pistols as she joined the Rebellion. Thus, the role of the courtesan Azeezun could not be brushed aside or ignored in both contemporary colonial and nationalist accounts on the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur, despite the constant stigmatization of this section of women in both colonial and nationalist narratives. But one has to read these sources 'against the grain'. In Kanpur, Azeezun's name is alive in the people's mind and memory.[16]

Azeezun lived in the Lurkee Mahil, in Oomrao Begum's house in Kanpur. Her mother was a courtesan in Lucknow. Azeezun's mother died when she was very young and she was brought up by a courtesan in Lucknow.[17] So Azeezun must have left the city of Lucknow and settled in Kanpur. Why did she leave the city of Lucknow, considered to be the centre of culture where the courtesans enjoyed patronage, and come to Kanpur, a city of 'bazaar' and military cantonment and not appreciated by the courtesans? Besides, in those days, there were no railway trains, and so the people of Lucknow never bothered to leave their town. On the other hand, the best artists and craftsmen from other cities came to Lucknow because it was only in this city that they received the appreciation due to them. Owing to the paucity of sources,

one can only draw inferences from other literary writings. Here, reference can be made to a literary writing *Umrao Jaan* by Ruswa,[18] in which the courtesan Umrao Jaan shares her experience of a stay in Kanpur when she had come to the city from Lucknow. To quote Umrao Jaan:

> It got about that a courtesan of Lucknow had arrived in the city and men began to drop in. There was music and singing in my apartments from the early hours of the evening to well past midnight. People also got to know that I wrote verse. There was hardly a day when I was not asked out to parties and symposia and there was no dearth of invitations to sing. In a short time I earned a lot of money. Although I did not like the ways and the manner of speech of the people of Kanpur and was reminded of Lucknow at every turn, I enjoyed being my own mistress so much that I never thought of going back. I knew that if I returned to Lucknow, I would again have to be one of Khanum's girls. All the women in the profession feared Khanum and if I had set up on my own no one would have had anything to do with me. I would also have found it hard to get good musicians. And how could one run the business of dancing and singing without musicians? My introduction to the famous families of the city was also through Khanum. Although I was reckoned amongst the good singers of Lucknow, there were a great many as good as I was. And when all's said and done very few people can tell the difference between good and bad singing. Most people go by reputation. Great men's glances only fall on expensive balconies and establishments. Who could have bothered about me in Lucknow if I had set up independently in a modest way? In Kanpur I got more appreciation than I had ever hoped to get. In every festivity and in every wedding in the homes of wealthy aristocrats, I was invited as a matter of prestige. … It is only when one is away that one realizes the true worth of Lucknow. Many make their living on the name of Lucknow as I did when I was in Kanpur.[19]

Hence, one of the probable reasons for Azeezun going to Kanpur may have been her strong passion for independence. She probably did not want to stay under someone's patronage, being the kind of person that she was, as is reflected in her role in the 1857 Rebellion.

Azeezun was very close to the sepoys of the 2nd Cavalry, who visited her house. She was particularly close to the sepoy Shamsuddin Khan of the 2nd Cavalry. Shamsuddin played a very active role in the 1857 Rebellion in Kanpur. Meetings of rebels would take place in his house to work out plans for the Rebellion. Shamsuddin visited Azeezun frequently. Most of the colonial accounts mention how, two days before the Rebellion began in Kanpur, Shamsuddin had gone to Azeezun's house and told her that 'already the Nana Sahib held the Magazine and the Treasury, and in a day or two would be paramount in all things and then … she would see he would fill her house with gold *mohurs*' (coins).[20]

Besides the fact that Azeezun, who had been known to both Nana Sahib and Azimullah Khan, and whose house had been the meeting point of sepoys,[21] she was looked upon as one of the key conspirators in the 1857 Rebellion. It seems that she was aware that the Rebellion in Kanpur was planned for 4 June 1857. Her role is seen as that of informer and messenger. Some accounts also mention that Azeezun had formed a group of women, who fearlessly went around cheering the men in arms, attending to their wounds and distributing arms and ammunition.[22]

Azeezun made one of the gun batteries her headquarters. This was the battery to the north of Wheeler's entrenchment, between the 'racket court' and the 'chapel of ease'. It fired shot and shell into the entrenchment almost from the first day of the siege. During the entire period of the siege of Wheeler's entrenchment, she was in the midst of the soldiers. According to Nanak Chand, 'it shows great daring in Azeezun that she is always armed and present in the batteries owing to her attachment to the cavalry, and she takes her favourites among them aside and entertains them with milk etc. on the public road'.[23] Another eyewitness wrote that 'it was always possible to see her, armed with pistols in spite of the heavy fire, in the battery, amongst her friends, the cavalrymen of the 2nd regiment, for whom she cooked and sang'.[24] Savarkar's accounts mention how Azeezun 'had now put on a heroic garb. With her rosy cheeks and smiling lips, she was there on horseback, fully armed. And the artillery sepoys would forget all their fatigue at the sight of her'.[25]

Some accounts mention that Azeezun may have had a crucial role in the conspiracy to kill British women and children at the Bibighar. But in the Bibighar massacre, the role of Hossaini, another courtesan, who was lower in the courtesan's hierarchy, comes across in most accounts. Hossaini was one of the slave girls in Nana Sahib's palace. According to witness depositions in the enquiry instituted under Lt Col. Williams, Hossaini, called simply 'the Begum' in the accounts, supervised the prisoners inside the Bibighar. It is suspected that it was Hossaini who ordered the massacre of Bibighar, and when the sepoys proved reluctant, she fetched her lover Sarvur (or Sirdar) Khan, who was perhaps a Pathan.[26]

A popular version tells how Azeezun became a legendary figure:

> after the fall of Kanpur Azeezun was brought before the Military General, Henry Havelock, and Havelock was so struck by Azeezun's beauty that he could hardly believe what she was accused of, that is, her role in the Rebellion in Kanpur. To all appearance Havelock might have given in to his heart and spared Azeezun's life, had she only compromised with the British. But Azeezun knew how her weakness at this juncture would affect the morale of her compatriots.[27]

She boldly retorted: 'I stand committed to destroy the British, lock stock and barrel', and as the bullets of the firing squad hit Azeezun, she once more cried out '"Nana Sahib ki jai!" (Long live Nana Sahib), sending shivers down the

spine of the British'.[28] However, this popular version could not be authenticated by historical sources. In fact, there is a deposition by Azeezun in Lt Col. Williams' account, where she was asked about Shamsuddin and she denied ever having known him or, for that matter, any other sepoy from the 2nd Cavalry. Further, when Azeezun was asked specifically about the raising of the religious flag at Kanpur, she said that she had heard that it had been raised by Azimullah, who had taken Maulavi Salamutullah with him. Azeezun spoke of the whole incident as a spectator.[29]

This chapter highlights the role of Azeezun in the 1857 Rebellion. But there is also a need to look critically at the nature of her participation in politics. Azeezun's participation does not seem to question the masculinist division of labour on the battlefield. Her primary role, that of caring, entertaining and motivating, falls broadly within a patriarchal framework. Her womanly charm was to be exploited for motivating or extracting secret information. The whole discourse, colonialist and nationalist, reinforces the stereotypical image of such women as essentially women of physical charm and beauty.

Locating the courtesans

Although this chapter discusses the role of Azeezun in the 1857 Rebellion, there are bound to be hundreds of stories about the role of these women in the Rebellion, but most of them seem to have gone unrecorded. There are unsubstantiated accounts of girls taking to the streets in a battle with British soldiers. *Kothas* (houses of courtesans) became centres of conspiracy, and many of these women joined in the Rebellion of 1857. Their role is documented as covert but generous financiers of the action. These women, although patently non-combatants, were penalized for their alleged instigation of and pecuniary assistance to the rebels. The British officials were aware that their *kothas* were meeting points for the rebels, which were looked upon with suspicion as places of political conspiracy. In fact, their role in the Rebellion can best be judged from the ferocity of the British retribution that was directed against them. There was large-scale appropriation of their property. In Lucknow, the centre of courtesans, the British, after quelling the Rebellion of 1857, had turned their fury against the powerful elite. Their names were on the lists of property confiscated by British officials for their proven involvement in the siege and the Rebellion against colonial rule in 1857.[30] Ruswa's *Umrao Jaan* mentions how Umrao lived through the Rebellion of 1857. She was forced to leave Lucknow and her establishment was looted. In the novel, one does not come across her direct participation, but one definitely notices her sympathy towards the Rebellion.[31] One also comes across such references in other literary writings.[32]

How does one account for the participation of courtesans in the 1857 Rebellion? One of the factors was their close association with nawabs who were their chief patrons and whose power had been eroded by colonial authority. However, their participation cannot merely be seen because of their

close association with nawabs, the reason being that such an argument would deny any agency and political voice to these women. It was not incumbent on the courtesans to participate in the 1857 Rebellion even if they were under the patronage of the nawabs. Azeezun could have done anything, could have even forsaken Kanpur and left, as fighting and dying require courage of the highest order. One does not find any compulsion or pressure on her to participate in the Rebellion. Azeezun was not even under any nawab's protection or patronage. She stayed in Kanpur city and ran her *kotha*. To examine the reasons for the participation of courtesans in the 1857 Rebellion, one needs to look at the historical context.

The courtesans were an influential female elite, found at all Hindu and Muslim courts in the many kingdoms that made up the subcontinent before the British began to displace the rulers. In fact, one finds references to such women from ancient periods in India. In ancient India, there were *ganikas* (accomplished courtesans), who cultivated sixty-four *kalas* (arts) including dancing and singing, entertaining the rich and famous and having intimate relationship with royalty. They shared the company of nobles, men of taste and poets. A notable example was Ambapali (also called Amrapali), who was a royal courtesan (*nagarbadhu*) of the republic state of Vaishali, around 500 BC and mixed on equal terms with the royalty.[33] The *ganikas* were invited to meetings of scholars and poets held by the kings. Court patronage provided dancing girls with not only material prosperity but also respectability, social standing and political influence. There are references to their making generous donations for the upkeep of temples and gifts of gold and jewels for the deities.[34]

During the medieval period in India, courtesans were recognized as preservers and performers of high culture at court, who actively shaped developments in Hindustani music and *kathak* dance styles. They commanded great respect at court and in society, and association with them bestowed prestige on those who were invited to their salons for cultural soirees. It was not uncommon for the young sons of the nobility to be sent to the best-known salons for instruction in etiquette, the art of conversation and polite manners, and the appreciation of Urdu literature. Courtesans were artists who had to undergo rigorous training. They took training from the musicians, many of whom belonged to famous lineages. Much of late nineteenth-century Hindustani music was born and transformed in these salons to accommodate the new urban elite who filled the vacuum in patronage in the colonial period. Courtesans were valued as patrons of poets, scholars and, most importantly, as talented musicians and dancers.[35]

The courtesans were professionals and businesswomen, making an independent life for themselves. They organized funds, paid people and arranged for travels. They owned property and paid taxes. In fact, their names were mentioned in Lucknow city's Civic Tax Ledger of 1858–77. Some of the courtesans were in the highest tax bracket, with the largest individual incomes of any in the city. Their names were also on lists of property (houses, orchards, manufacturing and retail establishments for food and luxury items)

confiscated by British officials for their proven involvement in the Rebellion against colonial rule in 1857.[36]

They ran fully fledged establishments where dancing girls had to be hired and trained, musicians to be arranged and many other arrangements made. Courtesans were usually a part of a larger establishment run by a *chaudharayan* (chief courtesan), an older woman who had retired to the position of manager after a successful career as a courtesan. Having acquired wealth and fame, such women were able to recruit and train women who came to them, along with the more talented daughters of the household. The *chaudharayan* always received a fixed proportion (approximately a third) of the earnings of the courtesans to maintain the apartments, pay to hire and train other dancing girls and attract the musicians, chefs and special servants that such establishments employed. They enjoyed a position of prestige in society. Their decrees and decisions were binding on the members of the household. They also played a part in solving the problems of the courtesans and settling their disputes.[37] The household had other functionaries too: doormen, watchmen, errand boys, tailors, palanquin-carriers and others, who lived in the lower floors of the house or in detached servants' quarters and were also often kinsmen – who screened suspicious characters at the door, acted as protectors of the house and spied on the activities of the police and medical departments.[38] Property passed from mother to daughter(s). The male child was the deprived gender, entirely dependent on mother and sister. When married, his wife looked after the household chores. It was the daughters in whose education investments were made.[39]

Courtesans were intelligent women, unlike the notion held of them. Running the *kotha* and organizing the performance needed skills and operations at various levels. They had to deal regularly with the local police and *kotwals* (police officers) in different ways, either through bribery or in their own innovative, ingenious ways. They knew where to fight and where not to and were very much conscious of their survival. They invented covert, non-confrontational and devious ways for their survival and gradually learned to relate to or live in the man's world.

The advent of British power marked the erosion of the cultural power of the courtesan. British rule had marked the loss of the protection and patronage of royal courts that were their main patrons. Courtesans could practise their skills freely in the kingdom of Wajid Ali Shah. However, with the British takeover, even the king became a powerless prisoner in exile along with his influential courtiers. The British government overlooked the artistic and creative element of their *kothas*, equating these with brothels. Thus, their identity was adversely affected, and this trend continued even after the 1857 Rebellion. In fact, it is worth speculating whether the association of the courtesans with the 1857 Rebellion had anything to do with what followed, namely the effort to 'regulate' the courtesan, like the prostitute, with provisions of Britain's Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 being incorporated into a comprehensive piece of Legislation in India – Act XXII of 1864.[40]

The collective impact of these regulations and the loss of court patronage and, later, the material penalties extracted from them for their role in the 1857 Rebellion were a severe blow to the courtesans and signalled the gradual debasement of an esteemed cultural institution into common prostitution. The British had perceived the courtesans as an integral part of the elite. In a campaign waged against them to reduce their influence, the new government resumed control over much of the prime real estate given to them by the nawabs, and discredited the nobility who associated with them as dissolute and immoral. Yet, when it came to matters such as using these women as prostitutes for the European garrison, or collecting income tax, the British decreed rules to make this possible. It became official policy to select healthy and beautiful 'specimens' from among the *kotha* women, and arbitrarily relocate them in the cantonment for the convenience and health of the European soldiers. This not only dehumanized the profession, stripping it of its cultural function, but made sex cheap and easy for the men while exposing the women to venereal infection from the soldiers. Stripped of their privileges under the control of the colonial army, they fought against the assault on their persons, their property and their 'immorality'. In other words, from the colonial period down to the present day, they continue to struggle to retain their validity and some of the tangible benefits of a professional group.[41]

The anger of the courtesans against British rule can be seen in this context. In popular writings, there is a tendency to highlight the fact that courtesans were enemies of the British because of cases of rape against them. However, looking at their participation in the 1857 Rebellion merely from the perspective of anger would be to deny any political subjectivity to these women. One would like to bring them into the domain of politics, seeing their participation as a political decision.

Forefronting the courtesans as political subject

There are references in history to courtesans playing an active role in politics. A.H. Sharar, in his classic work *Lucknow: The Last Phase of An Oriental Culture*, speaks of one celebrated *tawaif* without whose help it was not possible to seek an audience at the court of Avadh.[42] Some famous courtesans commanded not only wealth, honour and respect but also considerable political influence. Many courtesans were employed by the state to act as spies for obtaining the enemy's secrets and forging political alliances. They were sent as gifts for the pleasure of kings and overlords by their feudatories. A number of them accompanied the ruler to the battlefield.

We refer here to Begam Samru and Hazrat Mahal, who emerged as important political figures and who began their profession as courtesans. Begum Samru played a key role in politics and the power struggle in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India. The Mughal ruler Shah Alam acknowledged Begam Samru as a dynamic woman and his esteemed protector, and the military strategists of the East India Company considered her

crucial to their territorial ambitions. Begum Samru's acquisition of tremendous political, military and economic clout has been well documented. Her talents in diplomacy and her political wiles have been noticed, as have her instincts for survival and success.[43] Similarly, Begam Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the Avadh Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, emerged as an important political figure. She joined hands with the rebels in providing leadership when Wajid Ali Shah was in British exile in Calcutta. Under her leadership, the rebels had succeeded in seizing the control of Lucknow. Requested by the rebels, Hazrat Mahal agreed to crown her minor son Birjis Qadr and name herself as regent. Interestingly, the other Begums were approached before her, but none agreed to crown their sons as king, fearing the repercussions of such an action. After a long siege, Lucknow was recaptured by the British, forcing Hazrat Mahal to retreat in 1858. She refused to accept any kind of favours and allowances offered by the British rulers. She spent the remaining years of her life in Nepal.[44]

There are bound to be many other references to the role of such courtesans in politics. However, most of the accounts do not acknowledge the fact that such women began their professional lives as young courtesans. Whenever their political role is discussed, their professional life, which marks the beginning of their career, is kept in the dark or shrouded in mystery, or one gets a very cursory account of their earlier life, with the main narrative dwelling on their political career. The middle-class discourse finds it difficult to negotiate with their professional life. In the mainstream discourse, the transformation from a professional woman as a courtesan to a political figure appears abrupt, unusual and something dramatic. To give some examples from narratives on Begam Samru:

> A Kashmiri girl, who from abject poverty and obscurity rose to the command of a European drilled brigade, the sovereignty of a territory and the honoured position of a shield to the Delhi imperial family.[45]
>
> The meteoric rise of Begam Samru, the protagonist of the historic novel, dazzled her contemporaries and even today, it astounds. Starting out as a prostitute, she ended up as the commander of her own troops; the recognized ruler in her own right of the rich principality of Sardhana, a Moghul noble, who was honoured with titles bestowed by the Emperor.[46]
>
> This is the story of a woman, who rose from poverty and unknown to riches and fame. It is the story of her achievements and her survival through the buildings she erected. Here is a Cinderella story in real life, the story of a girl who at the age of fifteen captivated the heart of a dashing commander, followed him in all his adventures, succeeded to all his wealth and position, became a Catholic at the zenith of her power, fought at the head of the troops she led, and erected buildings that assure her of immorality.[47]

The mainstream narratives also, while describing these women, bring their physical charm and beauty to the forefront. Surprise is expressed as to how

such women with beauty/physical charm could have possessed organizational skills and leadership qualities. In this context, it is worth quoting some mainstream narratives on Hazrat Mahal:

> Before Wajid Ali Shah's marriage Hazrat Mahal was a dancing girl and after that she became the most respected Begam. She was so beautiful and attractive that the Nawab would call her 'mahakpari'. When Wajid Ali Shah after giving her the status of 'mahakpari', allowed her to join his 'parikhana' he possibly did not realize that this fairy one day would become so intelligent, expert in state craft and strategist in battle or that she would be referred as the 'Janabe Alia' of the Avadh Sultanate.[48]
>
> Behind Begum Hazrat Mahal's graceful nature and physical charm lay the qualities of a strong leader and an adroit strategist.[49]
>
> While Begam Hazrat Mahal was brought up to live a carefree life of abandon, she actually possessed a strong character that was resolutely expressed through the leadership she provided.[50]

The mainstream discourse looks upon the entrance of such public women into the political space as an exception. There is an underlying assumption that such public women cannot be patriotic, nationalist or political or, if they are patriotic, they leave behind their 'dirty' profession or would not be indulging in such profession. Savarkar, while describing Azeezun's role, says that 'she was not one, who sold her love for money in the ordinary market, but in the field of freedom it was given as a reward for the love of country'.[51] Sometimes, while discussing their contribution to politics, mainstream narratives like to highlight that these women were of noble blood and came to the profession of courtesans under highly dramatic situations, that is being forcefully abducted and sold to this profession. The underlying assumption is that women of 'noble' blood can be patriotic or serve the country. Sometimes, such women are exonerated from such a 'bad' profession by virtue of their service to the country.

The shift from the career of a courtesan to the political domain was not as abrupt as it is often made out to be. While it may seem to be an abrupt and unexplainable transition, it was not so in practice. This is precisely because of their active links with men in public life (in their capacity as courtesans), and also their close proximity to the political domain. But this transition was difficult for conventional middle-class morality to accept. Consequently, they were left with no choice but to bring these women's professional life to the forefront, which they, simultaneously, wanted to invisibilize or erase. The middle-class discourse, when forced to deal with such women because of their significant contribution to politics, ignores their profession, unless it was necessary to pass any 'judgement' on them. While discussing these women's role in the public space, it would be easier to comprehend if their professional life is kept in mind. There is the interconnection between their professional and political roles. Even from what little we know about their lives, it

becomes clear that, in the process of being readied for the profession, the girl-children had to undergo a rigorous training. Would not Begam Samru's training and the skills that she was taught as a young girl being prepared for a public life among men have stood her in good stead when she had to negotiate with foreign soldiers, conspire with war lords, patronize the indigenous male aristocracy as well as extract favours from the pope?[52]

The courtesans had close associations with royalty and the court. As they were linked to the urban milieu, they were also very conscious of civic issues, which set them apart from other women. Above all, they were aware of contemporary politics, the law and had connections among the local power elite, besides being well informed about the history of the city. In their view, the British had deliberately muddled the truth about their *kothas* in order to denigrate nawabi culture and justify annexing the kingdom of Awadh in 1856.[53]

One would like to add another aspect relating to these courtesans: the mobility of these women was greatly facilitated by virtue of the fact that they had no family responsibilities and were not under the protection of any man. These women could step out of their houses without any inhibition and take part in the Rebellion. Patriarchy flows through the institution of the family. However, one cannot romanticize or glorify the situation of courtesans for being outside the family structure because, despite being outside this structure, the courtesans are subject to patriarchal order.

Thus, by bringing the figure of the courtesan centrally into the political space, a space denied and invisibilized in nationalist discourse in its search for respectability, an attempt is made in this chapter to explore their public/political role. Foregrounding women such as Azeezun, who is neither a 'respectable' mother nor a wife, the quintessential inspirational figures in the nationalist discourse rupture the dominant bourgeois nationalist discourse. It disrupts the trope of 'mother India' that dominated anti-colonial (middle-class) nationalist thought.

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Notes

1 Surendrakaant (1989); Banerji (1989); *Bengal Harkaru*, April 1858; Taylor (1993).
2 Sangari and Vaid (1989: 1–26); Chatterjee (1989: 233–53).
3 Borthwick (1984: 194–97).
4 For details, see Banerjee (1989: 127–79).
5 Borthwick (1984: 268–69); Jones (1976: 95–99).

6 Srinivasan (1985: 1869–76).
7 See also L. Singh (2007b: 93–116).
8 Bhadra (1985: 229–75).
9 Kidwai (2004: 48).
10 Evidence is also forthcoming as to how some of the women from the singing community raised money for the Congress during the anti-imperialist movement. Similarly, Jaddan Bai, the famous singer, helped the left-leaning Progressive Writer's Association financially in the 1930s. Nevertheless, the presence of these women in the nationalist domain caused tension among the middle class. Similarly, Kidwai (2004: 49) mentions that the presence of Gauhar Jaan, India's first recording megastar, at a Congress session was objected to by 'respectable' lady supporters and the singer was asked to stay away.
11 Mukherjee (2007).
12 Trevelyan (1865: 99). The British always referred to courtesans as whores or prostitutes.
13 Trevelyan (1865: 99).
14 Savarkar (1970[1909]).
15 Savarkar (1970[1909]: 216).
16 Thus, in 2007, newspapers reported that some people in Kanpur had desired that one of the roads be named after Azeezun.
17 Taylor (1996: 26–27).
18 Ruswa (1961).
19 Ruswa (1961: 141–45).
20 Trevelyan (1865: 68).
21 Thomson (1859: 33).
22 Hardikar (1965: 124–25).
23 Trevelyan (1865: 147–48).
24 Trevelyan (1865: 140).
25 Savarkar (1970[1909]: 227).
26 Taylor (1996:156–58); Nayar (2007: 126).
27 Chandra (1986: 35).
28 Chandra (1986).
29 Mukherjee (2007: 108–9).
30 Oldenburg (1984:124–80).
31 Ruswa (1961).
32 Hyder (2003a,b).
33 Chatursen (2003).
34 Nevile (1996: 24–39).
35 Manuel (1987: 12–17); Sharar (1975: 192); Oldenburg (1984: 131–42); Kidwai (2004: 50).
36 Oldenburg (1984: 145–80).
37 Kidwai (2004: 50); Hyder (2003b: 173).
38 Oldenburg (1991: 31).
39 Kidwai (2004: 50).
40 Thus, along with prostitutes, courtesans were also subjected to the same medical laws that were designed to control venereal disease afflicting the European soldiers. This meant that, along with the prostitutes, the courtesans were regulated, inspected and controlled wherever European soldiers were stationed in India; Oldenburg (1991: 28–33).
41 Oldenburg (1991: 33).
42 Sharar (1975).
43 Banerji (1989).
44 Surendrakaant (1989); Mukherjee (1984); Bhatnagar (2005).
45 Banerji (1989).

46 Singh (2004).
47 *Basilica of Our Lady of Grace*, Meerut: Sardhana, 2001.
48 Vohra (1988: 57).
49 *India's Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi: Indian Posts and Telegraphs Philately Branch Information, 2007, chapter on '1857'.
50 Charu Bahri, *Begum Hazrat Mahal*, www.indianmuslims.info (web page).
51 Savarkar (1970[1909]: 216).
52 Kidwai (2004: 50).
53 Oldenburg (1991: 33).

8 Discourses of 'gendered loyalty'

Indian women in nineteenth-century 'mutiny' fiction

Indrani Sen

The Great Rebellion of 1857 – which was perceived as a defining moment in colonial history and termed the 'Epic of the Race' by the Victorians – was a landmark event that deeply impacted nineteenth-century colonial discourse.[1] It generated, from the 1860s onwards, the pseudo-historical genre of the 'mutiny' novel, which commanded an extensive readership in both colonial India and metropolitan Britain, reaching its peak of popularity during the period of high imperialism in the 1890s.[2] Generally published in Britain by India-based colonialists, such as military officers, civil administrators and also by novelists located in the metropole – most of whom had never visited India – these texts generally projected the conflict between the colonisers and a large, hostile, 'native' population, along racially polarised lines.[3]

Indians were usually cast as the 'other,' as lascivious, cruel and treacherous, and contrasted with the valiant British – thereby feeding into myths pertaining to race, culture, sexuality, power and gender. By circulating such images, this discourse served to produce 'colonial knowledge' about the significance of the Great Rebellion in the popular imagination. Indeed, one can perhaps even say that this literary discourse possibly affected popular perceptions about the Great Rebellion in nearly as significant a manner as the numerous 'mutiny' diaries and memoirs that were written and subsequently published by British men and women. It is important to remind ourselves at this point that the strategic importance of this genre lay in its efforts to reinforce colonial power in the context of post-Rebellion insecurities and uncertainties. Hence, there was a need to present epic narratives of British heroics.

Much has been written about the iconisation of the white woman in the colonial imagination by Jenny Sharpe and others who have demonstrated how the Englishwoman was inscribed in this discourse as a creature to be exalted, admired, protected, cherished, avenged and as an institution that faced the threat of desecration.[4] Indeed, in the nineteenth-century 'mutiny' novel, the issue of gender did occupy a key position.[5] Partly because, historically speaking, white women had been a conspicuous presence in the Rebellion, gender often came to be conflated with 'nation' in the mythology of empire.[6]

Interestingly, studies on gender and the literary discourse of the Rebellion have tended to focus essentially on white women and have neglected Indian women of different classes. Jenny Sharpe's classic study, for instance, is almost entirely silent on colonised women, whereas Nancy Paxton, who has touched upon representations of both races of women, has tended to focus on elite Indian women alone. In my earlier work, I had discussed women of both races in 'mutiny' fiction and, in this chapter, I wish to take the exploration further by probing an important trope that has, somehow, escaped scholarly attention.[7] If we read along the margins of these texts, we note a relatively marginal figure of an Indian woman who, surprisingly enough, supports not her own people, but the British, during the Rebellion. Inscribed in a few 'mutiny' novels, this female figure offers a fascinating entry point to unravel the efforts to buttress and reinforce colonial power through textual strategies. How this trope, with all its tensions and contradictions, was played out in fiction, what was the strategic deployment of this female figure and what were the agendas that were fed into are some of the questions that I hope to examine in this chapter. For this purpose, I shall be drawing upon some well-known 'mutiny' novels, but also several others, not so well-known, old texts that have got 'lost' over the years and have largely eluded critical scrutiny. My effort will be to interweave literary representations with the 'historical realities' pertaining to the Great Rebellion, and to probe the tensions, contradictions, continuities, and shifts between them both.

Generally speaking, of course, British newspapers and periodicals tended to paint lurid pictures of 'native' – including female – treachery and cruelty.[8] The *News of the World*, for instance, described Indian women as 'active instigators of the sepoys in their worst atrocities'.[9] 'Mutiny' novels too generally echoed such constructs. 'The character of Natives', pronounced 'Hafiz' Allard in his novel *Bismillah* (1869), 'is essentially treacherous'.[10] The 'native' female populace was sometimes projected in fiction as heartlessly mocking dying English women, while princely women such as the Rani of Jhansi and the wife of the Delhi Emperor were scripted as intriguing, promiscuous, cruel organisers of massacres of English women and children at Jhansi and at the Red Fort at Delhi.[11]

However, alongside such widespread negative constructs, there also appeared the trope of 'native' fidelity. Although novelist Hafiz Allard declared that 'Asiatics are proverbially treacherous', he also conceded at the same time, 'still we met with many instances of individual fidelity during the late war'.[12] Regarding the figure of the 'loyal' Indian in this literary discourse, one can identify three broad variants: these are the loyal courtesan or dancing girl; the faithful 'native' concubine or (far more rarely) the wife of the English hero; and the devoted ayah who risks her life for her master's family. Finally, there is also the thematic of inter-racial female friendship between an Indian and a white woman. My argument in this chapter is that the construct of the 'loyal Indian woman' in this discourse is a politically loaded one, which, deployed against the backdrop of the Rebellion, assumes complex, ideologically loaded signification.

Gender and the Rebellion: intricate interlinks

In the Victorian imagination, as Anne McClintock and others remind us, the colonising process was often seen as a quasi-sexual activity. In an entanglement of gender, sexuality and nation, colonised lands were feminised as 'libidinously eroticised' female entities, waiting to be mastered by 'manly' colonising nations.[13] In the colonial psyche, the figure of the 'native' woman, in turn, was often conflated with that of the colonised land – the subjugation of the woman signifying the imperial conquest of the land. In an eroticisation of power, the body of the 'native' woman thus became a site of contestation between coloniser and colonised. Gender thus formed what Mrinalini Sinha has termed 'an important axis along which colonial power was constructed'.[14]

Discursive colonial writings reveal a heightened cultural focus on the 'native' woman during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Behind this lay numerous factors, most notably the colonial 'native' female social reform programme. The *Calcutta Review* in 1869 termed the 'native' woman question 'the absorbing topic of the day' and, indeed, around this period, the issue of women's uplift became an important tool of colonial ideology, with the British 'civilising' mission justifying the need for their continued presence in India.[15] The *Calcutta Review* in 1861 attributed British sympathy for oppressed Hindu women to the knightly, 'chivalrous sentiments of English men' and the 'elevating aspects of our sublime faith towards the sex'.[16] By thus projecting the reform agenda as a 'rescue' of Indian women from 'native' patriarchal practices, this discourse also fed into myths of Victorian chivalry.[17]

Gender and the events of 1857 were interlinked in numerous other intricate ways as well. The Rebellion, for instance, was perceived, among other things, as a 'clash of civilisations'. Forming a part of this larger cultural clash were the antithetical gender attitudes which supposedly distinguished European reverence for women from the alleged Indian contempt for them. Voicing this, G.O. Trevelyan drew attention in *Cawnpore* (1864), his study of the Rebellion, to European 'sentiments of knightly tenderness and devotion' towards women and claimed that the 'radical difference between the views held by Europeans and Asiatics' with regard to gender had been one of the important factors behind the uprising.[18] Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Rebellion, nineteenth-century colonial social reform measures pertaining to Indian women often came to be blamed, along with several other factors. Cited in particular were legislations such as the 1829 ban on *sati* (widow immolation) and the 1856 legalisation of widow remarriage (which had been passed merely a year before the Rebellion), and many, such as writer Flora Annie Steel, strongly criticised colonial reform interventions as an ill-conceived 'tinkering with Indian law'.[19]

Loyalist dancing girls in 'mutiny' fiction

Among the figuration of the 'loyal Indian woman' in colonial fiction was that of the *nautch* girl (dancing girl). In the colonial psyche, the *nautch* girl was an

object of erotic fantasy. From the eighteenth century until about the 1840s, *nautch* (dance performance) had formed an intrinsic part of British social life in India, especially at social gatherings at the homes of wealthy Indians. On these occasions, where both British men and women were present, music and dance were provided as entertainment by the 'native' hosts. The *nautch* girl, by virtue of being a female public performer, existed outside the sexually controlled confines of the marital home. Indeed, as Jyotsna Singh reminds us, 'the courtesan inhabited a liminal space, outside the domestic sphere and yet close to the power centres of the aristocracy … who were their patrons'.[20] Enjoying greater female agency, she thus appeared in Victorian eyes as a disturbingly subversive figure, with a female sexuality that contrasted with the containable sexuality of the Victorian wife and threatened to undermine colonial domesticity.

English responses to the *nautch* were mixed, as is evident from descriptions in colonial writings by men and women during the 1830s–1840s.[21] While some, such as Julia Maitland in the 1830s, considered it a monotonous but harmless entertainment, the majority found it obscene.[22] Captain Godfrey Mundy described it as disturbingly sensual, 'even bordering on the disgusting', whereas Emma Roberts, another contemporary, criticised the *nautch* as 'not particularly decorous' when performed for 'male eyes alone'.[23]

Indeed, gradually, under the impact of Evangelism and Utilitarianism, the *nautch* came increasingly to be frowned upon as sensual. Even more importantly, it was thought to be culturally destabilising – or, as the evangelical-minded Mary Martha Sherwood put it, 'dangerous to young Europeans'.[24] By mid-nineteenth century, as a result of the increasingly Europeanised lifestyle and reduced social interactions with Indians, the *nautch* became a distant memory. Notwithstanding this, however, it is striking how the courtesan continued to exercise an erotic power over the colonial imaginary and continued to remain a prominent figure in its literary discourse.

The Rebellion of 1857 further complicated the image of the *nautch* girl because of her historical role during the event. It was reported that courtesans and dancing girls played an active, instigative role at important centres of the Rebellion, such as Meerut, Lucknow and Cawnpore (Kanpur). At Meerut, on 10 May 1857, when the eighty-five rebel sepoys who had refused to use the greased cartridges were thrown into prison, bazaar prostitutes reportedly refused to give sexual favours to the remaining sepoys and taunted them for being 'cowards'. Stung by these taunts, the sepoys freed their imprisoned fellow-soldiers and broken out in revolt – thus signalling the beginning of the Rebellion across the country.[25]

In her study of the courtesans of Lucknow, Veena Oldenburg has argued that these *tawaifs* (courtesans) who prided themselves on being artistes were hostile to the British who had been unable to appreciate their talents in poetry, music and dance. In fact, occupying the high moral ground, the British had grouped elite *tawaifs* and low-ranking *randis* (prostitutes) together as 'dancing and singing girls'.[26] During the Rebellion, courtesans openly supported the

rebels, and their *kothas* (salons) provided a meeting place for rebels; in the aftermath of the siege of Lucknow, the British confiscated their property for their involvement in the rebellion.[27] Similarly, recent research further indicates that, at Kanpur too, courtesans such as Azeezun Nissa played a prominent, combative role in the Rebellion, including the taking up of arms.[28]

Consequently, in the aftermath of the 1857 Rebellion, courtesans and prostitutes came to be imbued with greater ambivalences and repositioned in colonial perceptions. In addition to being associated with a culturally subversive female sensuality, courtesans now also came to be associated with anti-British political activities. However, when it comes to the literary narratives of the 'mutiny', it is striking how this discourse widely re-inscribes the *nautch* girl as a pro-active British colluder. In innumerable texts, dancing girls appear as alluringly beautiful, canny and clever British informers, perfectly equipped for the task of information-gathering from their elite 'native' patrons. In other words, this forms part of a textual strategy to contain and incorporate a sexually and politically subversive figure. What is more, it also marks an attempt to rewrite history and erase the memory of the courtesan/*nautch* girl's adversarial role during the Rebellion by projecting her as a British collaborator.

In a few rare exceptions, however, *nautch* girls are figured in an anti-British role. One such rare instance is found in Flora Annie Steel's definitive 'mutiny' novel, *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), which echoes the historical events at Meerut by showing the 'bazaar women' as active instigators of the Rebellion. Unlike the majority of fiction writers, Steel, who had done considerable historical research for her fictional account, shows a prostitute named 'Gul-anari' and others taunting the sepoys and making them break out in revolt.[29]

Such representations, however, are rare. More generally, the courtesan is presented as an active British supporter – as happens in Philip Meadows Taylor's famed 'mutiny' novel *Seeta* (1872), where the enchanting *tawaif*, Peri Buksh, routinely spies on the nawabs who attend her dance performances and gathers information for the British.[30] Traditionally, of course, courtesans enjoyed royal patronage and possessed great wealth, respectability and social standing, apart from wielding political influence. And Taylor, with his familiarity with Indian social institutions, takes care to locate the *tawaif* tradition as a respected, ancient and time-honoured practice, thereby presenting the figure of the courtesan as a wielder of power and social influence:

> Centuries ago, her progenitors had sung and danced before the kings of Malwa and Khandesh … the family of the Peri were therefore esteemed 'highly respectable' and she … *possessed considerable influence and authority.*
>
> Taylor (1872: 337; my emphasis)

Consequently, when the courtesan, with her 'considerable influence and authority', is shown supporting the British cause in the text, the narrative serves to strengthen the image of the British as a much-loved presence in the colony and one that is desired by the people.

Similarly, in 'Hafiz' Allard's relatively less well-known novel, *Nirgis: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* (1869), the eponymous, 'fifteen years old' dancing girl at the Delhi palace is projected as a British supporter.[31] She openly declares: 'As long as the Company lives, I am its subject' (p. 64). Her loyalty is based on gratitude, since the 'Saheb-log, the rulers of our country, always reward poor slaves liberally' (p. 12).

At the same time, the scripting of the courtesan in this text has greater nuances, complexities and ambivalences than in Taylor's novel. Thus, Nirgis is a supporter of both the British and the Emperor of Delhi. Especially close to the begum Zeenat Mahal and the Mughal emperor's family, she moves freely in and out of the female quarters in the palace, which ring with the youthful laughter of the palace girls. Indeed, at one point in the text, her pride in Delhi's rich, precolonial, legacy of the Mughals and the Delhi Sultans is profoundly stirred at the sight of the city's still glorious remains: '[W]hen Nirgis gazed on the magnificent buildings about Delhi, the work of its emperors, she felt puzzled how the Company had attained its present exalted rank' (p. 63). At such moments, her British loyalties seem to be complicated and undermined by pro-Mughal emotions.

Nevertheless, attached though she may be to the Delhi emperor's palace, her primary loyalty does lie with the British, and she avoids lingering inside the palace for too long. At the same time, she resists all attempts by the Company's wily Indian advisers to make her spy for the British, and refuses to betray the palace which has always been kind to her.

The inevitable clash between Nirgis' contesting loyalties comes to a head when she meets and falls in love with Lieutenant L'Adone, a military officer with the East India Company – a meeting that marks the turning point of the novel. Subsequently, when the English troops, who have retreated to the Ridge during the siege of Delhi, urgently need information on entering the heavily guarded Red Fort, it falls upon Nirgis, with her intimate knowledge about its fortifications, to provide them with this strategic information. Agonised by conflicting loyalties, the reluctant Nirgis finally discloses the secret of the Fort out of love for the Englishman. As she sorrowfully finds herself turned by a twist of fate into a British informer, the British quickly enter the Red Fort and succeed in crushing the Rebellion at Delhi.

If we put aside for a moment the difference in circumstances that distinguishes the nuanced emotions of a Nirgis from the unambiguous pro-British collusion of a Peri Buksh, one notes the common thread that runs from Allard's heroine to Taylor's beautiful *tawaif*, whereby the courtesan is rewritten into the literary narratives of the 'mutiny' as an adversary of the Great Rebellion.

Miscegenation in 'mutiny' fiction: concubines and the faithful Indian wife

Overwhelmingly encoded in literary discourse throughout the colonial period is the trope of inter-racial love between Englishmen and beautiful, dusky

'native' women. This trope of miscegenation played out the fantasy of the colonial enterprise as bearing what Ashis Nandy has termed a 'husbandly' or lordly prerogative, involving 'masculine' energy and sexual conquest.[32] Mapped against the background of the 1857 Rebellion, miscegenation in the 'mutiny' novel further underlined the erotic and political subjugation of the colonised woman/colonised land.

In an earlier era, as Durba Ghosh has demonstrated, keeping 'native' wives or companions or making marriage alliances between high-ranking Muslim women and Company officers had been fairly common.[33] However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, given the increasing social and government disapproval, formalised inter-racial marriages had virtually come to an end. Of course, in the secret life of the community, a 'native' mistress or concubine continued to be kept in actual practice in a covert fashion, especially in remote, far-flung plantations or distant *mofussil* (rural) postings. Indeed, the idea of miscegenation with a 'native' woman continued to fascinate the colonial imaginary. As late as the 1930s, George MacMunn mentioned the continuing sexual attractions of Indian women for whom the sensuous appellation 'black velvet' was often used.[34]

Moreover, the image of the *pativrata nari* (devoted wife) of Indian tradition held a special appeal for the colonial imagination. The female paradigm of the modest, patient, faithful Hindu wife who traditionally worshipped her husband and even followed him to death through the act of widow immolation or *sati* was something they found strangely alluring. 'Mutiny' literary discourse too sometimes sought to deploy this figure of the white man's 'faithful Hindu wife' in order to underline support for the British. Most prominent in this regard is Philip Meadows Taylor's novel *Seeta* (1872), which seamlessly weaves together personal and political loyalties during the 1857 Rebellion, through the unconventional mixed-race marriage between a beautiful, young Sudra (low caste) widow and an English administrator.[35] Seeta, the faithful Hindu wife, is also a learned Sanskrit scholar with an intelligent, questioning mind. That such a woman should support the British rather than the rebel cause makes her espousal of the British all the more significant.

Gender issues, social reform and the Rebellion of 1857 are intricately fused together in this novel. The British are projected as 'saviours' of Indian women, and their reformist interventions are etched as the colonial 'rescue' of colonised women from 'native' patriarchy. In contrast, the rebels are presented as revivalists who fiercely oppose reform measures and are bent on reviving patriarchal practices such as *sati*.[36] In particular, the rebels oppose widow remarriage, which they see as a danger to the 'native' widow's unharnessed sexuality because, under the new law, every widow can, 'like a prostitute' (p. 149) take a new husband. In this context, Seeta's own widow remarriage, in which an Englishman (i.e. her husband) plays an active part, assumes special symbolism.

Jenny Sharpe and others have pointed out how the 'mutiny' became a catchword among Victorians for knightly honour and the chivalric protection of women.[37] In Taylor's novel too, a Hindu widow's inter-racial marriage to a

British administrator becomes a very public act of colonial, chivalric 'rescue' (although the text does admit that her low-caste Sudra community does allow widow remarriage). Seeta's worshipful praise of the British, 'We only love you and worship you, as we do our gods' (p. 109), underlines Indian womanhood's gratitude for this 'rescue'. It also valorises the colonisers as saviours (and even 'gods') of colonised women. More importantly still, as Nancy Paxton has argued, this novel reveals the 'sexual rivalry between English and Indian men' over Indian women.[38] In fact, in the novel, the rebels are shown to be suspicious of the lecherous British motives underlying the new law that permits widow remarriage and fear designs upon their women's sexuality. Miscegenation is thus located in this text as an inflammatory issue, and as one of the causes of the Rebellion, with rebels resenting the fact that the British are now stealing their women.

As we noted, the figure of the Hindu wife who traditionally worshipped her husband as a god was indeed a figure that exerted great fascination over the colonial psyche.[39] In this text, Seeta, as a *pativrata nari* of Hindu tradition, is shown to be inspired by the image of 'devoted wives' from Hindu mythology such as Sita and Savitri.[40] Fearing for his safety during the Rebellion, she becomes a virtual bodyguard to her English administrator husband, dons male attire and accompanies him on horseback, armed with a small pistol. In the end, she is killed trying to shield him from a rebel's attack, and her death fuses together the images of the self-sacrificing Hindu wife with that of the loyal 'native' soldier who died in order to preserve British rule.

As we saw earlier, in 'Hafiz' Allard's novel *Nirgis*, the dancing girl's love for the English military officer, with its commingling of personal and political loyalties, had led to her betraying the Delhi palace. However, the erotic relationship in Allard's novel is complex and undercut by ambivalences. Moreover, a competing narrative gestures at the one-sidedness of the girl's love. The English lover's body language suggests race and class inequalities, while the text resonates with the ambiguity of small incidents, such as his condescending affection for her, his seating her (albeit lovingly) not by his side, but on the carpeted floor beside his chair.

Notwithstanding all this, however, we find that Nirgis remains steadfastly faithful to her beloved. Even after the Englishman is killed in the victorious battle of Delhi, the grieving girl remains true to his memory and embarks on a pilgrimage to Mecca, pledging lifelong celibacy. At the same time, however, when she sees the 'general ruin which had fallen on Delhi' (p. 172) during the phase of ferocious British retribution, she is filled with profound 'sympathy for its people' (p. 172). The text notes that she 'saw and heard much' (p. 172) of the inhuman sufferings of the city's people. Later still, the narrative critiques the British role in the Rebellion by admitting that they had 'wandered too far from the path of impartial justice' (p. 175). Thus, in a rare inscription, Allard's novel shows the faithful Indian girl interrogating the moral righteousness of the British cause – despite remaining essentially loyal to the British.

While these narratives do fuse together constructs about British erotic conquest of colonised women with 'native' female loyalty, it is important to point out the underlying fears and anxieties about miscegenation. Long-term interracial sexual relationships, after all, do threaten to culturally destabilise colonial identities. Inevitably, then, these texts end in the erasure-through-death of the loyal concubines/wives (and, occasionally, in the death of the white man) – but only after their erotic and political subjugation during the Rebellion has been effectively established.[41]

The faithful ayah in 'mutiny' fiction

Nineteenth-century colonial discourse located the Indian woman along the twin axes of sensuousness and loyalty. The ayah, the most prominent of the 'faithful Indian women' in mutiny discourse, fitted into the latter category. Historically, the ayah was, by mid-century, the average memsahib's closest link with 'native' India. This was due to the reduced social interactions between the races by that time. Different opinions about the ayah prevailed in colonial discourse: whereas the majority lauded her devotion, especially to the children, a few criticised her as dishonest, gossipy, lazy and neglectful. Others felt that her 'propensity to worship at the shrine of the Baba-log' (European children) made her unfit to impose the requisite discipline inside the colonial nursery.[42]

In the historical real, the ayah was often virtually a surrogate mother to European children, who often grew up speaking the vernacular more fluently than English – in contrast to their mothers who were usually ignorant of the local language. Often, children found it difficult to communicate with their English-speaking parents. Indeed, this closeness between ayahs and children often evoked colonial anxieties – resulting in the practice of sending the children away to study in England after the age of five or so.[43]

The dynamics of the memsahib–ayah relationship, which were a part of the everyday colonial 'transactions' of a typical colonial household, were of course predicated on race/class hierarchies and domestic power structures.[44] However, the upheavals wrought by the Rebellion sometimes disturbed these power relations. White families sometimes found themselves temporarily dependent for their very survival on the loyalty of their domestic servants. In many cases, it was these servants' humble huts that served as a sanctuary and a hiding-place for the masters. Indeed, numerous first-person 'mutiny' accounts, such as memoirs and diaries by memsahibs, indicate how, for many white families 'on the run' or in hiding, the master–servant roles momentarily underwent a reversal during these turbulent times.

Colonial accounts of the role of Indian servants during the Rebellion are varied. A number of non-literary writings feed into the myth of the 'ungrateful' and 'disloyal' Indian. Thus, Katherine Harris noted at the siege of Lucknow how 'People's servants seem deserting daily', including her old bearer, 'who has been with us almost ever since we came to India'.[45] Like many others, she

too mentioned the destabilising of household hierarchies inside the colonial home, evident in the manner in which servants were becoming insolent, with their 'impudence' going 'beyond bounds', losing 'even the semblance of respect' (p. 47). Others, such as Ruth Coopland at Gwalior, noted how her ayah suddenly regarded all her belongings 'as her share of the plunder' and 'watched where I put my things'.[46]

At the same time, however, 'mutiny' diaries also often narrated accounts of loyal servants risking their lives to save their masters' families. Thus, during the siege of Lucknow, Adelaide Case mentioned how her 'faithful ayah' walked all the way from 'Cawnpore' (Kanpur) to find her, while Ruth Coopland described how her ayah and bearer had saved their lives by alerting them about a rebel attack.[47] Indeed, this image of the faithful ayah entered what Jenny Sharpe has termed the 'racial memory' of the Rebellion. Several decades later, in the 1880s, the wife of a civil servant gratefully recollected that 'many an ayah in the Mutiny proved her devotion at the cost of her life, and many would do so again'.[48]

'Mutiny' fiction too echoes this construct of the loyal ayah – who had indirectly, but effectively, served to maintain her sahibs' (colonial) power. In an early novel, *First Love and Last Love* (1868) by the metropolitan writer, James Grant, the 'faithful Ayah' (p. 229), working for the old Delhi *padre* (chaplain) Mr Weston, desperately (even though unsuccessfully) tries to save his youngest daughter from being abducted during the Rebellion. She seeks no reward, 'none but in the love I bear the poor memsahibs and little Missee Polly Baba' (p. 347).

It has been well documented by now that, despite several signs of its coming – such as the circulation of *chapattis* (unleavened bread) or the passing of a lotus from village to village – the British failed to read the signs of the impending Rebellion and were completely taken by surprise when it exploded.[49] Indeed, in many instances, it was their domestic servants who first picked up news about it from the bazaars and the streets and alerted their masters about it. This happens in J.F. Fanthorne's unconventional novel *Mariam: a Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (1896), in which devoted ayahs play a key role. At the novel's opening, set in the days immediately preceding the Rebellion, there is a smell of danger in the air to which the English, including the Lavater family, remain oblivious. In this context, it is their two servant woman, Lado dai and Champa, a faithful old ayah who has been with them for years, who learn about the coming storm from a neighbour's servant. Mrs Lavater explains, 'Bibi Smith's cook told my ayah' – and the servant women warn their mistress about trouble brewing.[50]

However, their warnings are not taken seriously (except by Mrs Lavater who feels uneasy but helpless to do anything about it). When the congregation at church is attacked one Sunday morning, her husband, a clerk in the magistrate's office, is killed along with many others, while their fourteen-year-old daughter survives the attack and runs all the way home, dazed and terrified. Subsequently, when the Lavater home is burned down by the rebels and the

family is forced to flee, it is the two devoted servant women who insist on physically accompanying them through the entire phase. In fact, at one point, when they are in hiding, Lado, who had ventured out of their hiding place, is captured by a hostile local nawab's men who terrorise her for information about the white women – but the devoted servant woman refuses to reveal anything.

Flora Annie Steel's authoritative 'mutiny' novel, *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), also pays tribute to loyal servants and notes: 'What would our lives be without our servants, who let us remember, outnumber us by ten to one'.[51] In fact, the text reveals how the deep trust born out of the close ties between 'native' servants and white children saved the latter's lives. The memsahib mothers feel shaky and unsure about their servants, but it is striking how 'the children trust them' (p. 24) implicitly. Thus, Steel shows how, during the Rebellion, a suspicious-minded memsahib feels uneasy about trusting an orderly who is completely devoted to her one-year-old baby girl – while the child, in contrast, has complete faith in him.

Indeed, innumerable non-literary 'mutiny' accounts reveal the special attachment that Indian servants felt for European children. Diaries and first-person accounts by Adelaide Case at Lucknow or Harriet Tytler at Delhi, for instance, describe how Indian servants continued to feel deep affection for their young charges throughout the Rebellion.[52] 'Mutiny' fiction too showed the ayah–child emotional relationship. Born out of this attachment is the important trope of ayahs saving white children who are lost or orphaned during the Rebellion – by disguising them as 'native'. Thus, in Steel's novel, an 'old *mai*' (ayah) saves a neighbour's small son, Sonny Seymour, during the turbulence, even though she does not work for his family. She stains his face and blonde hair dark, puts him into 'native' clothes and passes him off as an Indian child for several months.[53] Throughout the Rebellion, the old woman 'mothers' the white child, devotedly feeding him milk and 'chikken-brat' (chicken broth). The ayah, in fact, emerges virtually as the surrogate mother of the white child.

As we noted earlier, white children in colonial India brought up by servants generally spoke the vernacular (rather than English) as their 'mother tongue' – to the utter dismay of most European parents. Paradoxically, as the old ayah in Steel's novel points out, it is this crucial ability of 'speaking our language' (p. 317) that confers protection upon the English child. S/he is thus able to survive – by temporarily attaching herself or himself to a surrogate Indian mother and assuming an 'Indian' identity. Hence, as these texts demonstrate, the old colonial anxieties about the children's closeness to ayahs – and the consequent dangers of creating an 'Indianised' white child – are now turned on their head. For it is precisely these close ties that now save the children in these turbulent times – in a context where European parents do not manage to survive.

Inter-racial female friendship in the 'mutiny' novel

The thematic of 'inter-racial female friendship', which is a feature of some key 'mutiny' texts, seeks to strategically locate the Indian woman within an

anti-Rebellion stance. In the historical real, inter-racial female friendships were virtually non-existent by the mid-nineteenth century. Given the restrictions of caste and *purdah* (seclusion of females), which debarred any meaningful contact between elite women of the two races, there was hardly any scope for inter-racial female friendship. With the exception of visits by missionaries, access to the *zenana* (women's quarters) was confined to the occasional, formal, stilted *purdah* visits by memsahibs.

However, during the Rebellion of 1857, given its extraordinary circumstances and its disruption of 'order' and 'normality', instances of unusual interaction between women of both races did sometimes occur. Middle-class English memsahibs, who were until then notoriously cut off from 'native' India – other than from their servants – were sometimes ejected from their sequestered lives in 'British' enclaves and forced out into the 'native' areas as they fled from their homes. All of a sudden, as white women's 'mutiny' diaries narrating their escape from Delhi, Gwalior, Agra and other centres reveal, they had to contend with the tremendous heat of northern India in the summer months of 1857. In addition, they had to encounter the everyday sufferings, physical hardships and disease associated with long sieges at Lucknow, Delhi and Kanpur.[54] Occasionally, their imperial identities were fractured as they had to abandon their homes and hide in Indian houses (generally belonging to loyal servants) or flee through the countryside, dressed in Indian garments. They were thus forced by circumstances to experience some kind of a relationship – however transitory, bitter, hostile, sympathetic or a commingling of all these – with women (and men) of the 'other' race, although, as neither could speak the other's language, these interactions would have been limited.

References to memsahibs being given temporary shelter in Indian homes are found in numerous non-literary colonial writings. In her account of their escape from Delhi, Fanny Peile mentions how they received offers of help from locals, including a Delhi banker named Behari Lall, to 'secrete our children and selves, along with his wives, in his zenana'.[55] Flora Annie Steel, who perused government files and documents made available for her research for her 'mutiny' novel, *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), noted in her autobiography: 'Of course, it is well-known that an Englishwoman … was concealed in the town of Delhi during the siege. I found evidence of it in my brass-bound chests'.[56] Harriet Tytler, in her eye-witness account of the siege of Delhi at the flagstaff tower, also mentioned a woman named Mrs Leeson who was rescued by some sympathetic Afghans. This woman had survived the attack on 12 May, the first day of the Rebellion in Delhi, and had been kept hidden in a *moulvie*'s (Muslim priest) house in the city for more than three months. She had stayed there with the womenfolk in his family and had been treated with the 'greatest kindness and respect'. Later, her Afghan rescuers helped her reach the British forces at the flagstaff tower, 'dressed like a native Afghan boy, in khakhi'.[57] In fact, in his report on Delhi, Col. Keith Young noted that

> reportedly, there are still some 30 Europeans concealed in the city … those who have Europeans in concealment wouldn't dare to acknowledge it, or talk about it to their dearest friends, as they would be certain to be murdered if the Sepoys found it out.[58]

These transitory, cross-racial interactions between Indian and English women, which were a feature unique to the Rebellion, do trickle down into literary writings – re-inscribed in the process as the trope of 'female friendship'.[59] Undergirding this 'female friendship' are patriarchal, Victorian gender ideologies of 'separate spheres', constructions of masculinity and femininity, of 'outer world and inner world', 'manliness' (viz. aggression and combativeness) and 'womanliness' (viz. gentleness, nurturance, pacifism). All these help to project the violence of the 'mutiny', in some sense, as the 'male' violence of the rebels. Posed as a counterpoint to it is the peaceful and non-violent 'female space' of the *zenana*.

These inter-related constructs of female pacifism and friendship are briefly presented in Hafiz Allard's *Nirgis* through an episode in which the dancing girl befriends a mysterious, golden-haired girl who suddenly materialises during the massacre of white women and children in the Red Fort at Delhi – but is not subjected to any violence by the awestruck rebels, who 'looked on with awe and wonder … No one dared to strike the girl with the golden hair' (p. 88). As Nirgis and this white girl sit alongside each other, the narrative gestures at a female space that they momentarily occupy which remains undisturbed by the 'male' violence raging around.

But it is really in J.F. Fanthorne's *Mariam* (1896) that the representation of inter-racial female friendship reaches its culmination. When the Lavater women flee their home after the Rebellion first begins, they are given shelter in sympathetic 'native' homes. Initially, they are helped by Lala Ramjimal, a Hindu known to them, who hides them for about two weeks inside his own house – disregarding his frightened mother's and wife's urgings that he shift them elsewhere for fear of danger to themselves.

Inside the Lala's house, the fugitives assume 'native' identities. The entire family group (described by Mrs Lavater's daughter as consisting of 'dear mother, granny, myself, Anet, my cousin, Cocky, mother's half-brother; and his mother, our old servant Champa and Lado dai, another servant'; p. 161) all take Indian names, although it remains unexplained why Muslim identities are adopted inside a Hindu home. Thus, Mrs Mary Lavater is now renamed 'Mariam', her pretty young daughter becomes 'Khursheid', the girl cousin Anet is called 'Nanni', the male cousin Cocky becomes 'Ghulam Husain' and granny is called 'Bari-Bi' (p. 188).

Hints in the text suggest that the Lavaters have Eurasian blood – evident in their ability, unusual among European memsahibs, to speak the vernacular. This language ability immensely assists these female interactions. The white women adopt 'native' clothes such as *lahangas* (skirts) and *dupattas* (cloth covering the upper part of the body), share a 'native' diet of *dal* (lentils),

chapatti and *gulgula* pickle with the 'native' women and settle into the domestic routine of a Hindu household:[60]

> [A]s everyone of us could speak the Urdu language with fluency, and we readily fell in with the domestic habits of a native household, it would have been difficult for one who had seen us before to know us again as the same Lavaters (p. 188).

Thus, these women temporarily adopt an 'Indian identity', subsuming their own 'white identity'. Gail Ching-Liang Low has argued that the 'fantasy of cross-dressing' in colonial literary writing in general is a strategy of colonial control by which a 'native' identity is adopted in order to control the 'native'.[61] In the historical context of the Rebellion, the assumption of a 'native' identity by white women and children was of course a desperate means of survival. Moreover, in these 'mutiny' texts, 'cross-dressing' sometimes leads to greater cultural contact – rather than to greater rift – between the two races. At the same time, one can speculate here whether this narration about entering the *zenana* is a simple attempt to 'Indianise' the white women. Or whether it is a strategy of empire, a mode of colonial control to 'conquer' the *zenana*. This latter strand does seem to be emphasised by the Lavaters' command of the vernacular. Indeed, many post-Rebellion discussions in colonial circles emphasised the importance of knowing the local language as a means of exercising control by the British.[62]

The Lavater family is, however, soon discovered by Mangal Khan, a rebel sympathiser who comes searching for white fugitives, suspicious that the Lala's house harbours white people. Mangal Khan, however, does not harm them, as he is greatly attracted by the beauty of Mrs Lavater's young daughter. Instead, he puts them all inside the *zenana* (female quarters) in his own household, where they are welcomed by the *zenana* women, deeply sympathetic to their plight – with the exception of Mangal Khan's jealous wife.

Inside this Muslim *zenana*, even greater gendered understanding between the races takes place than in the earlier Hindu home. One *chachi* (aunt) affectionately addresses both white women as '*beti*' (daughter), while another is enchanted by Mrs Lavater's 'perfect Hindustani' (p. 264). Subsequently, when the entire group is shifted to the house of another aunt, they assume a 'Muslim' identity and lifestyle, wearing clothes such as *kurti* (shirt), *paijama* (baggy trousers) and *dupatta*, using coconut oil for their hair and eating the staple food of *qualia roti* or *dal roti* (lentils and unleavened bread).[63] Some of the *zenana* women, in fact, even strongly condemn the violence directed at white women and children during the 'mutiny'. Qamran, in particular, is strongly pro-British, and she loudly laments the fate of the European women and children at Kanpur, exclaiming, 'what had these helpless and innocent ones done to merit their dreadful fate?' (p. 345).

In the historical real, the aftermath of the Rebellion of course found a yawning racial divide. The novel critiques this growing gap in the post-Rebellion

phase. It seeks, as mentioned in the text's Preface, to promote racial harmony and help the English 'recognise the common fraternity of the two races' (p. iii). The construction of female friendship in this novel is strategically geared towards this effort. It is important to note that this close intermingling helps women of both races to dispel racist prejudices about the immorality of the 'other' women. The Indian women's prejudices about the promiscuous 'hunger of *Firangi* [European] women for male company' (p. 301) are demystified. So too are their race and gender prejudices about the immodesty of 'barefaced' (p. 308) European women who 'dance with their persons half-nude' (p. 302) and have the 'arms of strange men round their waist' (p. 302) and – most shocking of all – 'kiss and are kissed by [men] other than their husbands' (p. 302).

Indeed, as the white women settle down, quietly working all day 'with our needles and thread' (p. 299) along with the other *zenana* women, the latter realise that

> far from going out of our way to seek the company of men, we did not even raise our heads to look at the few who had the entrée of the female apartments – when they saw and observed this our prudent conduct, the belief gained ground that all that had been said of us was false and malicious (p. 300).

As violence rages all around them, the *zenana* presents a 'community of women', an enclave of peace that cuts across race. This trope, of course, plays into the stereotypical, patriarchal image of women as 'pacifist' and men as 'aggressors'. It thus seeks to (re)present the Rebellion as the violent, male strife of the 'outer' world, and the cloistered, female 'inner world' as a haven of peace:

> For whatever may be the causes or motives which may have inspired their men to deeds of violence in the outer world, a calm serenity always prevailed within the four walls of the zenana; there was no disturbance of any kind there … (p. 300).

Mangal Khan now presents his proposal for Mrs Lavater's daughter's hand in marriage. He does it in the 'Indian' manner, by respectfully approaching the young girl's mother, but is firmly rejected – revealing thereby Mrs Lavater's very British abhorrence for miscegenation.[64] Much later, after the fall of 'Dilli', Mangal Khan's family flees and, later on, he himself comes and takes a written statement from Mariam (Mrs Lavater) and her daughter, testifying to his good treatment of them – but they never see him again.

In the end, the white women, still retaining their 'Indian' identities and dressed in 'native' clothes, travel by covered bullock carts and reach the safety of the British lines. They realise at that point how illuminating had been their encounters with women of the 'other' race inside the *zenanas*. Inter-racial

female encounters in these texts, then, gesture – however briefly – at a space for 'friendships' during the Rebellion.

Conclusion

We saw in this chapter how the trope of the loyal Indian woman was strategically foregrounded in many nineteenth-century 'mutiny' novels. In a sense, the Indian woman represented the land and, hence, perhaps there was a felt need to 'colonise' her textually, by inscribing her as 'loyal'. Different variations of this category – ayahs, dancing girls and the Englishman's Indian concubines and wives – were deployed as part of a larger textual strategy to secure support for the British in the context of the 1857 Rebellion. It is striking how the scripting of these women – from servants to goldsmiths' daughters – was along the lines of feudal loyalty and allegiance. Rooted in race and gender politics as well as the politics of representation, this trope fed into colonial agendas of projecting British rule as desirable and to bolster a flagging morale – so vital in the context of post-'Mutiny' political insecurities – and reinforce the hegemony of the empire. At the same time, ironically enough, this image of the loyal Indian woman did, at some level, dilute the predominant 'mutiny' myth of the 'barbaric' and 'cruel native'. Thus, while seeking to strengthen British claims to empire, this trope of female loyalty succeeded inadvertently in presenting a competing narrative that in fact undermined and militated against constructions of 'native' treachery upon which the very mythology of empire had been predicated.

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Notes

1 The 1857 Rebellion gave rise to the immensely popular genre of the 'mutiny novel', the first of which was Money (1859). For almost 100 years, the 'mutiny' novel remained among the most prominent literary genres in British India. For a comprehensive list, see Singh (1973: 230–31).
2 For details, see Chakravarty (2005).
3 Popular metropolitan 'mutiny' novels include, among others, Grant (1868[1913]); Henty (1881, 1893).
4 See Sharpe (1993: 57–84). However, Sharpe primarily focuses on non-literary writings.

5 In keeping with common practice, I have used the term 'mutiny' fiction to refer to a specific literary genre. Throughout this chapter, I have put the word 'mutiny' within quotes to interrogate the term.
6 Englishwomen were present at long sieges at Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow and were victims of massacres at Jhansi, Delhi and, most notably, at Kanpur (Cawnpore).
7 See Paxton (1999) and Sen (2002: 93–193). Also, it is most striking that, in a recent study, gender is not considered as a category at all; see Chakravarty (2005).
8 For a discussion of representations of the 1857 Rebellion in British newspapers and periodicals in the metropole, see Blunt (2000b: 412–14).
9 *News of the World*, 22 November 1857.
10 Allard (1869a: 94).
11 For a discussion of cruel aristocratic women in the 'mutiny' novel, see especially Sen (2008a: 252–76).
12 Allard (1869a: 248).
13 McClintock (1995: 22).
14 Sinha (1995: 11).
15 'Hindoo Female Celebrities', Part I, *The Calcutta Review*, 48 (95), 1869: 54.
16 'Women of India', *The Calcutta Review*, 36 (72), 1861: 315.
17 Colonial social reform targeted *sati*, female infanticide, child marriage, polygamy, oppression of widows, enforced female illiteracy and *purdah*. Along with legislation (e.g. the act banning *sati* in 1829; the Hindu widow remarriage act of 1856, the Age of Consent acts of 1860 and 1891), they encouraged the promotion of female education from the 1860s onwards and the slow eradication of *purdah*.
18 Trevelyan (1865[1992]: 75).
19 See Steel (1909: 346). Reform legislations that were blamed for the Rebellion included the act banning *sati* in 1829 and the Hindu widow remarriage act of 1856.
20 Singh (1996: 105).
21 For contemporary accounts of 'nautch girls' by white women, see Sen (2008b: 3–16).
22 Maitland (1843[1846]: 27–28).
23 Mundy (1832, Vol. I: 92); Roberts (1835, Vol. 3: 187).
24 Sherwood (1910: 405–6).
25 For details, see Wild (1999: 176).
26 Oldenburg notes that, in Lucknow in the 1860s, 'a randi … charged a nightly rate of five rupees and often more; a tawaif insisted on a hundred rupees a night and also received lavish gifts of jewellery and property' (Oldenburg 1991: 58).
27 Oldenburg (1984: 145–80).
28 For details, see Singh (2007a: 58–78).
29 Steel (1896[1985]: 98). Similarly, in a short story (set after the Rebellion), Rudyard Kipling shows the courtesan, Lalun, working against the British. Her salon is a site of political ferment, and she sweetly tricks an English admirer into facilitating the escape of Khem Singh, who is a former 1857 rebel and a political prisoner; see Kipling (1892[1960]).
30 Taylor (1872[1887]: 338).
31 Allard (1869b: 9).
32 Nandy (1998: 5).
33 Ghosh (2006).
34 MacMunn (1934: 124).
35 Instances of inter-racial marriage (as distinct from concubinage) in 'mutiny' fiction include that of Elsie, a beautiful hill girl, who is married to an Englishman and is a fervent supporter of the British, in 'Gillean' (1887).
36 For a discussion of Taylor's *Seeta* especially in the context of the Rebellion, see Sen (2002: 119–30).
37 For chivalric traditions and Victorian culture, see Sharpe (1993: 76).
38 Paxton (1992: 18).

39 Around the later decades of the nineteenth century, this image of the devoted Hindu wife attracted attention and was often used in debates to counter the nascent feminist movements in the west.
40 Sita, the patient, long-suffering wife of the hero Rama in the epic *Ramayana*, and Savitri, the faithful wife of Hindu mythology, who brought back her husband from death, epitomise faithful wives in Hindu tradition.
41 In 'Gillean' (1887), the Indian wife dies of an illness at the end; in Steel (1896 [1985]), the white hero's 'native' concubine also dies.
42 Diver (1909: 36). For praise of the ayah's devotion, see Sherwood (1854: 337); for criticism of the ayah, see Maitland (1843[1846]: 114). For a comprehensive delineation of white women's perceptions of the ayah, see also Sen (2008b: 63–93).
43 Chaudhuri (1988: 517–35).
44 For details, see Sen (2009).
45 Harris (1858[2006]: 46–47).
46 Coopland (1859: 109).
47 Case (1858: 33–36); Coopland (1859: 109).
48 King (1884, Vol. 1: 130–31).
49 For a discussion of signs of the impending Rebellion that were ignored, see Steel (1909: 352–54).
50 Fanthorne (1896: 85). A footnote in the text explains that 'Bibi Smith' is the style of referring to the 'native' wife of a European.
51 Steel (1896[1985]: 296). However, not all servants are steadfastly loyal in this novel; the English hero's two trustworthy servants, Tara and Soma, teeter on the brink of treachery during the Rebellion when ordered to guard a memsahib hidden in the house, although they eventually do not betray their trust.
52 See Case (1858); Sattin (1988).
53 See also Duncan (1894), in which an ayah disguises a white child who is separated from his parents during the 1857 Rebellion and raises him as an Indian.
54 Personal accounts of escape by white women during the 1857 Rebellion include Peile (1858); Coopland (1859); Wagentreiber (1894). White women's accounts of the siege of Lucknow include Bartrum (1858); Case (1858); Harris (1858[2006]); Inglis (1892). For recent discussions of women's narratives from Lucknow, see Blunt (2000a: 229–46); Klaver (2001: 21–58).
55 Peile (1858: 24).
56 Steel (1929: 218).
57 Sattin (1988: 155–57).
58 See Sattin (1988: 217).
59 Taylor (1872[1887]) shows a female friendship between Seeta and Grace Mostyn, but the issues there are very different and unrelated to the Rebellion.
60 Fanthorne (1896: 188–201).
61 Low (1996: 218).
62 In fact, Flora Annie Steel identified a command of the Indian languages as a means of imperial control and attributed the Rebellion to an absence of 'knowledge of the vernaculars' on the part of the British; see Steel (1909: 352).
63 Fanthorne (1896: 274–77).
64 In 'mutiny' fiction, miscegenation between an English woman and an Indian man is sharply censured as a defilement of white racial purity; for details, see Sen (2002: 26–27, 99).

9 The 'disposable' brethren

European marginals in eastern India during the Great Rebellion

Sarmistha De

> In Calcutta, Lord and Lady Canning were endeavouring to maintain an appearance of calm amongst people who behaved as though they were threatened with imminent slaughter. Lord Canning … insisted that the ball at Government House, customarily held on the Queen's birthday, should take place as usual. As it happened the ball was 'a very fair one'. The respectable and serious made a point of coming, and one English lady, perturbed by a rumour that villainous Indians would take advantage of the ball to murder all the leading members of the community, declined the invitation and hired two British sailors to stay in her house for the night to protect her, but they got tipsy, and frightened her more than imaginary enemies.
>
> Hibbert (1978)

The above description perhaps encapsulates the fear that gripped the English residents in Calcutta after the onset of the Great Rebellion. More striking is the reference to the white woman feeling threatened by the white sailors, whom she had hired to protect her. In fact, the Great Rebellion did bring into focus the lower rungs of the European community, who acquired sudden importance and attention from the core of European society and the colonial administration. As the Great Rebellion assumed momentum, what haunted the English was the insignificant numbers of the ruling community in a vast and populous country such as India. This added to their fear, anxieties and apprehension. In this context, the colonial administration started recruiting European soldiers and sailors of every hue in the army, navy and police force, although it was realized that, if every insurgent or every mutineer was to be put to death or transported beyond the sea, the ruling whites needed 200,000 European soldiers, which was obviously impossible to muster up. However, it was accepted by the administration that there should be a visible overall presence of armed European men to 'overawe' the sepoys and other disgruntled sections of the 'native' population.

European soldiers and sailors who were normally counted as 'outcast' had to be accommodated in the imperial body. To fit these otherwise 'intruders' and 'outcasts' in the 'superior ruling self', the imperial authority tried and experimented with all sorts of devices. Their number and mode of presence

was adjusted according to the requirements of the empire. During the crisis, these people were indiscriminately recruited with high pay and other benefits. Yet, after the crisis was over, the administration could not or did not want to afford the expense of maintaining the entire European force.

The select committee appointed by the British parliament explored the possible ways of strengthening its hold over India. It was decided that colonization was not possible in the overpopulated country, but settlement of a section of Europeans who had skills and capital could provide the required strength. It was proposed that: 'A large extension of the number of settlers over India would be a considerable guarantee against the necessity for maintaining our expensive army'.[1] But the necessity of a significant European force could not be ignored as the settlers also demanded their presence for their safety.[2]

In spite of a few interesting works on the 'marginal whites' in India, their role during the Great Rebellion and its aftermath has not been explored. This chapter focuses on this dimension and examines how the 'avoidable undesirables' were transformed into 'unavoidable undesirables'. Further, it will focus on the way the imperial authorities dealt with their 'lesser brethren' during different stages in this defining moment.

The background

As long as the limited commercial and political engagement of the Europeans with India confined them to a few coastal factories and enclaves, the issue of white colonization and labour did not seriously arise. The Europeans who came to India in the earliest phase were very few and consisted mainly of traders with definite jobs. However, the question of settlement and colonization gained importance over the second half of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries, with the extension of the British territorial domain. The East India Company's attitude was almost wholly negative; it regarded 'talk of freer European access to India as a barely disguised assault on its commercial privileges and as a danger to its political and military ascendancy in India'.[3]

As an article in *The Calcutta Review* put it:

> From the very earliest days of the East India Company down even to within thirty years of the date when the Empire of India passed from the hands of a company of traders to the Imperial rule of the Crown of England, no one – not even English men – were allowed to settle in India, and follow even the most peaceful calling, without the special permission of the Court of Directors; and when, for any reason, an individual became obnoxious or troublesome, the permission was withdrawn and the offender deported.[4]

The East India Company was evidently a body of traders who were not concerned with the empire as such, nor with the fate of British citizens in India or the interests of other Europeans.[5]

An act of the British parliament (Act of the 53rd Geo:3rdCap:155.section 33) was enforced against the 'unlicensed' Europeans who had come to India without any specific job.[6] Interestingly, in spite of the tight control of the Company, the troublesome, unruly and poor whites had a visible presence even in the early days. In Calcutta, a fund was raised to give relief to the 'distressed European gentlemen' to the extent of 50 rupees per month (1819).[7] This altogether negative attitude towards the European underclass suddenly changed with the onset of the Great Rebellion in 1857. It dealt a serious blow to the confidence of the imperial power. The authorities suffered from a sense of insecurity as they faced the prospect of the liquidation of the few whites among a large indigenous population.[8] This fear was transformed into reality when the sudden political upheaval associated with the Great Rebellion compelled the colonial administration immediately to increase the number of Europeans in its armed force in India:

> Just before the Great Revolt, the East India Company had 36,000 British Soldiers and 257,000 Indian troops organized into regular regiments and 54,000 Indian soldiers in irregular regiments. Once the outbreak occurred, Britain sent massive military aid to the Government of India. By April 1858, there were 96,000 British soldiers in the subcontinent.[9] After the Mutiny it became the custom for troops to parade to church with rifle, belt pouch, side arms, and each man was issued with forty rounds of ball ammunition. The idea was that if a mutiny broke out while the troops were at church they would not be caught off guard.[10]

This was the logical fallout of a context in which no Indian could become a gunner in the Indian army. The artillery was kept as a safeguard against any possible mutiny by the Indian soldiers.[11] It was thought that,

> if the native element of the force is ever again allowed to acquire prominence, the knowledge of the fact and belief that there might some day occur a favourable opportunity for successful opposition, must necessarily and prejudicially unsettle the minds of the native soldiery, for the late mutiny can never be forgotten, and the tiger that has once tasted blood will always be hankering after a second feast.[12]

The European residents of Calcutta feared that the flames of the Great Rebellion that had spread in upper India 'may soon extend in all their horrors over the yet quiet portions of Bengal even to Calcutta itself'.[13] On 14 June 1857, Calcutta was firmly in the grip of panic. The Europeans in Calcutta believed a rumour that an uprising had actually taken place in Barrackpore the previous night and that the rebels were marching towards Calcutta. The 'panic Sunday' of 14 June was followed by another panic in July. It was believed that a large amount of arms had been bought by the 'natives' and concealed in the city. The panic was so pervasive that even the Grand Jury of

the Supreme Court, through the judges, asked the government that the 'native' population of Calcutta and the suburbs be disarmed.[14]

In this 'alarming' situation, 'natives' with arms were considered unsafe for the security of the Europeans. The inhabitants could no longer keep faith in the 'native' police. The European residents of Calcutta and its suburbs submitted a petition to the authority pleading for a European police force. They emphatically stated that they 'have no confidence whatever in the Native Police, either of the Muffusil or of Calcutta'.[15] Immediately, sixty 'able-bodied' Europeans were recruited to the Calcutta police. This process of arming the *sahibs* was not confined to Calcutta alone. The police forces of Howrah and Sulkea were organized 'quietly on the footing of the Calcutta police'.[16] Similar appeals were coming from Europeans residing in the smaller towns, which were centres of commercial and trade activities. The European inhabitants of Serampore asked for 'a company of European soldiers to guard the town'.[17] They even assured the authority of the possible accommodation of the troops in 'the lower apartments of Serampore College'.[18] In August, 200 European sailors were sent to Dacca as a safeguard against any possible disturbance. Pubna and Seerajgunge appealed for similar contingents of European sailors whose presence seemed to be of 'immense use in keeping quiet the line through which they passed'.[19]

The disbanded 'native' sepoys were considered a great source of danger, disseminating the spirit of revolt. To prevent the disbanded 'native' soldiers from procuring arms, the villagers in the neighbourhood of Barrackpore had been disarmed. In Calcutta, it was believed that the Nawab of Chitpore would help the disbanded soldiers in procuring arms to lead another revolt, although an intensive search revealed no significant evidence. In Murshidabad, a rumour spread all over the city that disarmed soldiers were making secret enquiries and were exploring the possibility of acquiring arms. In Serampore, the *badmashes* (ruffians) and 'disbanded sepoys' were marked together, and it was believed that they would create trouble during the *Rathyatra* festival. The arrested rebels, even while confined in Alipore jail, were a source of anxiety for the imperial authority. The superintendent of Alipore jail stated:

> I have been lately informed that when the men of H.M.'s 59th Regiment were sent to guard the jail, some militia sepoys were heard openly boasting that their regiment even without arms was more than a match for such a small number of Europeans.[20]

European forces were considered necessary to prevent the spread of the mutinous spirit. But they were more urgently required to confront the rebels in the theatres of action. In August 1857, the sparks of revolt reached the southern districts of Bengal. The troops of the 32nd Native Infantry had mutinied at Purulia and destroyed the station. The magistrate of Bancoorah (Bankura) informed the government of Bengal that a small troop of Europeans had arrived there to 'save the Railway Terminus and the mines of that

important place from destruction'.[21] Sensing the possibility of danger, the manager of Raneegunge Colliery, Stuart Gordon & Co., pleaded for a 'party of 20 to 30 Europeans for the protection of the Raneegunge Collieries', although the joint magistrate of Raneegunge had already asked for 100 Europeans which seemed to be 'absolutely required'.[22] Again in late October and early November, the second and third party of sepoys from the 32nd Native Infantry mutinied and destroyed public property. They left Ramporehat and moved west without facing much resistance. The government of Bengal felt the need to chase the mutineers but, as Bengal saw less violent actions, it was not given priority over north India. This resulted in the unchecked and uninterrupted movement of the mutineers undermining the imperial authority. The local administration felt that, if these districts were 'left without European troops', they would 'see disturbances'.[23] The government of Bengal wanted to mount pressure on the military department of India and, in an emotionally charged communication, highlighted the

> effects of these repeated progresses of unchecked mutineers through the richest and most valuable districts, the sufferings they must cause to the people and the unavoidable humiliation to which they reduce the authorities of Government.[24]

On 18 November, the mutiny in the 34th Native Infantry severely affected Chittagong town. The rebels plundered the treasury, let loose the prisoners, burned down their own lines and then left the station along with the whole of the treasury's wealth. The European inhabitants of the town were petrified. The ladies of the station were placed on board vessels, and for two nights the gentlemen slept in the Commissioner of Circuit's house. The administration tried to reassure them, but they barely managed to 'escape with their lives'; they were 'consequently in some dread and every rumour tends to increase it'.[25] The Europeans demanded fortifications as an emergency shelter and the speedy arrival of European troops in order to 'settle down'. In the absence of European troops, the mutineers could not be properly dealt with. The local administration confessed that they had no men on whom they could depend, 'some 11 or 12 understand the musket drill and about 30 probably be able to load a gun', and such an insignificant force was considered 'worse than useless against so much larger a body of men and thoroughly trained'.[26] European troops were 'greatly needed' for the defence of this frontier station, otherwise it was thought that the hill tribes would take advantage of the defenceless state. Being a remote area with hills and jungles, it was hard to trail the mutineers. Lack of communication was another hindrance in receiving actual information about the mutineers. The information received revealed that the mutineers were headed towards Tippera (Tripura). The administration became anxious that the rebels could get help from the local Kookie people. The correspondence from the judge of Tippera expressed the same apprehension: 'I have no idea that the Maharaja who is as timid as a girl will

communicate with mutineers, but I think his Kookee subjects may give us trouble'.[27] The Kookies were actually aiding the mutineers by supplying them with food, carrying baggage and cutting paths through the jungle. One hundred European sailors were recruited to defend Chittagong town as well as to chase the mutineers.

As Dacca had a considerable Muslim population, a band of European sailors had been stationed there since August 1857. The commissioner of the Dacca division was quite confident that 'the presence of the party of the seamen would prevent any outbreak'.[28] But on 21 November 1857, the 73rd regiment of the 'native' artillery offered strong opposition while European sailors went to disarm them at Lalbagh.

> The determined resistance of the sepoys, their strong position and the fact of their raising guns at their command prevented unfortunately the complete success to disarm them and enabled a considerable number of them to escape with arms in their hands.[29]

The presumption was that they would join the main body of their corps at Jalpaigoree. The administration of Dinagepore, Rungpore and Rajshahi wanted to ensure the arrival of the detachments of European seamen before the rebels could reach Jalpaigoree. In Barisal, too, uneasiness prevailed. The European residents were sending their families away to the interior of the district and burying their valuables. They were 'hastily fortifying a home in the station' to defend themselves 'until a force arrives from Calcutta'.[30] The commissioner of Assam pressed for a troop of European sailors. The urgency was expressed in the following statement:

> [T]he men might be sent in Pinaces drawn by a steamer if possible, but if no one be available I would still most urgently recommend that the men should be dispatched in the quickest boats procurable. If not in time to prevent an out break, they would still be of immense use in keeping quiet the line of country through which they passed. The trade of Serujgunj is so very valuable and the importance of keeping quiet the rich zillas round it so great, that the measure I have now proposed seems to me deserving of the immediate consideration of Government.[31]

The rise and fall of the white marginals

This was the context when European sailors were recruited to augment the European component in the armed forces. In December 1857, the governor general in council sanctioned the proposal of the lieutenant governor to raise 'a body of 200 or 250 European Seamen for service at Purneah, Dinagepore and Rungpore on the same rates of pay as those allowed to the men of the Assam Detachments'.[32] Many parts of east and north Bengal were riverine, remote and inaccessible. Considering the geographical and political situation, sailors

were recruited in large numbers, and the necessity of imparting military training to them was stressed:

> it is evident that, unless to some extent drilled and instructed before they leave Calcutta, bodies of seamen picked up indiscriminately out of the merchant ships in the port, could not be much relied on … ,[33]

But during the crisis period, the number of European sailors seemed to be always insufficient to meet the administrative demand. This insufficient number led the administration towards indiscriminate recruitment. Thus, as an official in the marine office wrote to the government of Bengal (31 August 1857):

> [T]here are not a hundred seamen to be found in the town of Calcutta. It appears to me however highly probable that many seamen who are now engaged as guards by different parties in Calcutta will be shortly available, and I would beg to suggest that as many as can be procured within the limit mentioned, be entered by the officers of the Indian Navy now in Port, and when a number is collected, that a party be despatched to the desired locality under the Command of officers as the only means of ensuring their steadiness and obedience.[34]

During the Great Rebellion, there was a huge intake in the Company's armed forces who were eventually discharged after the storm blew over and India was brought under the direct rule of the Queen. The army was amalgamated with the royal forces and the naval force was disbanded. For example, naval brigades stationed in places such as Jalpaigoree, Gaya, Mozufferpur, Chuprah and Dehree were disbanded, and Alipore, Assam and Chybassa were the only places where a force of European seamen would continue to be maintained.[35] Consequently, many Europeans who were drawn from the lower depths of the ruling race were deemed *useless* and *extra* and were discharged: the ex-soldiers, ex-navy men and discharged sailors contributed significantly to the crowd of pauper Europeans in Bombay and Calcutta. Here, I quote extensively from the report of the police commissioner of Calcutta, which is comprehensive, candid and ominous:

> These men, who have been accumulating during the last six months, have given the public at large and the police little trouble, and the offences they have seldom exceeded drunken brawls and pugilistic encounters. … I confess however that I look forward with some apprehension to the discharge in Calcutta of at least six hundred more seamen, most of them raised in a hurry, and many of them of very worst character. As long as they have money, nothing worse perhaps will ensue than drunken quarrels in the streets, but when they are destitute of cash and credit and without hope of employment, for in the present state of trade there is little chance of a quarter of the number being shipped for months, I

> should not be surprised if gangs were formed for the purpose of robbery. As far as Calcutta is concerned, the European police in my opinion is strong enough to put a summary end to anything of the kind, but there is nothing that I know to prevent Europeans plundering in the mofussil with impunity.[36]

After the removal of the brigade at Fort William, about 600 seamen were discharged. One senior naval officer and captain tried to draw attention to the consequences of this discharge:

> [So] large a body as 600 men will thus be brought to the Presidency and discharged from the service, under the authority of the Government of India, as they will contribute to swell the great number of unemployed seamen already crowding the streets of Calcutta, there is some danger of these men becoming destitute and left exposed to all the various consequences of want in the approaching hot weather. The same circumstances are stated to exist in all the neighbouring ports of India.[37]

As a report of the European Vagrancy Committee, Bombay, noted in 1862: 'Many, if not most, of the persons who come begging, are discharged soldiers'.[38] The committees formed later to understand and control vagrancy and pauperism among whites in the presidency towns confirmed this apprehension. The report of the Committee on European Pauperism in Bombay, 1867, showed that the huge intake during the Rebellion in both the army and the navy was followed by a huge discharge after the Rebellion was suppressed and the armed forces were reorganized. The report stated:

> At the outburst of the mutiny in 1857–58, the government added 1,706 men to the Indian Navy, which in the following year gives us the greatest number employed at one time, viz. 3,531. In the next year 43.2 percent of these men were discharged without pension and from that year (viz. 1859–60) the discharges continued at a less, but still very high percentage, until the close of the year. … The two years ending April, 1861 are those in which the greatest number of men were discharged from the army and in the former of these years the greatest annual increase was suddenly attained, the number rising from 22 in the year 1858–59 to 162 in 1859–60. On the whole during the last three years of the period under review 329 men were discharged from the army either without pensions or with pensions totally inadequate to their maintenance in India.[39]

In 1868, *The Friend of India* was unsparing in its comment:

> European vagrancy in India did not assume alarming propositions till the close of the Mutiny campaigns. … The indecision of Lord Canning who declined the responsibility of adopting Lord Clyde's vigorous

> counsels, led to discharge in India for many hundred soldiers who had fought the company's battles with a heroism which deserved very different treatment.[40]

During the Great Rebellion, the European soldiers and sailors (the newly recruited included) were hailed as saviours. However, after the Rebellion was crushed, they were being discharged without much ado, albeit with some apprehension. The police commissioner of Calcutta summed up the confusion and apprehension in the administration regarding the best possible way to discharge them:

> The only means I can think of to obviate these evils is to permit any or all of the men who are about to be discharged from the various naval brigades to apply to go to Madras, Bombay or the straits and to send them to the place of their choice at public expense. I do not think it fair to the people of Calcutta and the neighbourhood, to turn adrift among them hundreds of reckless Europeans, nor is it fair to the men themselves to discharge them in a place where there is not the slightest chance of their obtaining employment for months.[41]

Anxious about the fate of the discharged men, he observed that

> [In] addition to the injury which may be inflicted on the public at large by the summary discharge of these brigades I dread to think of the mortality[42] which must ensue among the men composing them turned loose in the hot weather, most of them at first with money, among the liquor shops, the bazaars and sinks of iniquity of Calcutta. … If it be determined that the whole brigades are to be discharged in Calcutta and the Police look after them, it is absolutely necessary in my opinion, that every place of public resort and entertainment should, as I before strongly recommended, be placed as they were previous to the introduction of the present Police Act, under the supervision of the police.[43]

He proposed to alter the law relating to unlicensed taverns and other places of public resort in Calcutta.[44] As proposed by the Lt Governor of Bengal:

> [Those] who are fit and willing to enlist should be recruited into the Army and that ships should be chartered by Government to convey the remainder to Australia and England, and unless these or other similar arrangements are adopted, the cost of the extra police which it will be necessary to entertain in Calcutta and the suburbs will be heavy, and the ill consequences great.[45]

True to the apprehensions, the discharged and eventually penniless Europeans thronged the streets of Calcutta. They were wandering in search of jobs. The

railways held out hope of some employment for them. Edward Palmer, agent of the East Indian Railway Company, stated:

> There are at present I should think, above a hundred Europeans wandering about Calcutta without any means or living, and my office is besieged with demand for employment by as many as twenty men in the course of a day, all more or less in debt to their lodging masters and some absolutely destitute. I gather from many of them that they have been discharged from some of the Brigades whose service are now no longer required and, as I understand, that there are a great many more of these men either about to be discharged, or already discharged, and on their way to Calcutta, it would, I think be desirable that the attention of the Government should be drawn to its results.[46]

Most of these men were sailors whose places had been filled up by *lascars* (Indian seamen). The number of merchant seamen who were losing their employment by the disbandment of these brigades represented a surplus of labour far beyond the requirement of the port.[47] The Table 9.1 shows the list of Naval Brigades discharged in different districts of the Bengal presidency just after the Rebellion had been put down, and Table 9.2 shows the places in Calcutta where these discharged seamen from the Naval Brigades took refuge.

The wandering Europeans in the streets of Calcutta did not escape the attention of *The Bengal Harkaru.* In its editorial on 4 May 1859, a Christian missionary humbly pointed out the 'use and throw' policy of the colonial government towards European seamen, subsequently making them 'homeless and destitute':

> I was first made acquainted with the circumstance of a number of our fellow countrymen sleeping on the maidaun by a Christian friend whom I met at the Alms House on Friday last and the same evening I was an eye witness to a group of men with their scanty bedding, proceeding in that direction. They were asked where they were going and they replied, 'on board', for the poor fellows are afraid to speak the truth. On Saturday night, when returning home, I was providentially led into the way of half a dozen of these poor men, with whom I had some conversation and their statement was to the effect that from two hundred to two hundred and twenty are distributed every night in secret places, being destitute and homeless.[48]

The policy adopted by the imperial authority towards its own underclass displayed an apparent dichotomy but was actually controlled by their immediate requirements. The presence of this lower order in the imperial body was determined by how and to what extent these men could be utilized. After their purpose was served, they were thrown away. After the storm was over, the government proposed to abolish some posts in government vessels to save

Table 9.1 List of Naval Brigades discharged in different districts of the Bengal presidency

	Place	*Unit*	*Date of pay-off*
1.	Midnapore	Naval Brigade	4 September 1858
2.	Akyab	-do-	4 September 1858
3.	Chybassa	-do-	28 September 1858
4.	Dinajpore	-do-	3 December 1858
5.	Seebsaugor	-do-	14 December 1858
6.	Moozufferpore	-do-	28 December 1858
7.	Chittagong	-do-	28 December 1858
8.	Pabna	-do-	30 December 1858
9.	Jalpigoree	-do-	11 January 1859
10.	Berhampore (20 men)	-do-	18 January 1859
11.	Chuprah	-do-	7 February 1859
12.	Debrooghur	-do-	28 February 1859

Table 9.2 Places in Calcutta where discharged seamen took refuge

	Where residing	*No. of seamen belonging to the Naval Brigades*
1.	Alms House	35
2.	Rodger's Boarding House	25
3.	Caledonia Hotel	03
4.	Bengal Alms	01
5.	Union Hotel	00
6.	Blue Anchor	01
7.	Victoria Hotel	03
8.	Windsor Castle	15
9.	U.S. Saloon	00
10.	Sailors' Home	09
11.	Bloomink's Boarding House	00
12.	Myer's Hotel	02
13.	Brown's Boarding House	00
14.	Philadelphia House	06
	Total	100

costs. A report details how the running cost of government vessels such as *Jumna*, *Meghna*, *Thames*, *Koel* and *Kalodyne* could be reduced by 3,000 rupees by abolishing posts such as gunners, boatswains and cooks for Europeans, etc. While one European crew was paid 8 annas per day, a 'native' crew was paid 2 rupees and 10 annas per day. Another government vessel, *New River Steamer*, could not take the risk of discharging European crews and the above-mentioned posts as they thought the presence of Europeans was still required, 'as the disturbed state of the country still prevailed'.[49]

The 'use and throw' policy of utilizing the marginal Europeans seemed to be followed very crudely. Large brigades of seamen were raised on high pay

for service in the interior during the whole of 1858 and, consequently, every temptation was held forth to seamen to desert or strike work.[50] After their discharge from such lucrative jobs, European seamen found it difficult to adjust in other services that were less remunerative and in no way comparable to the jobs in the Marine brigade. The pay for such jobs in government service, which the lower order of Europeans were suited for, was not good enough to tempt them to take employment. The men of the Marine brigade were paid 50 rupees a month as wages with a liberal allowance of rations and grog. They were also offered quarters and servants. They could not therefore reconcile themselves

> to the offer of situations, in which the highest pay was perhaps not half what they were in the habit of receiving and the Head Clerkship in the Magistrate's office was not sufficient to induce any of the Brigade who were qualified for it to accept the office.[51]

The commissioner of Chittagong reported:

> In trade two men of the late Brigade tried their fortune. One set up as shoe-maker and while he had materials he did well enough, but the difficulty, risk and expense of obtaining the necessaries of his trade from Calcutta were so great that a profitable occupation was not to be hoped for and the poor shoe-maker was obliged to transfer his talent to another market. The other commenced work as a blacksmith, he got ample occupation and did a good business for a year, and there was every hope that he had overcome all difficulties but the want of companionship of persons of his own class, rendered his life dull and he took to drinking. He then gave up work and embarked for Arracan where he hoped to find a ship and be employed as a sailor.[52]

These 'poor whites' struggled to subsist by whatever means they could, sometimes falling into poverty when they were discharged from jobs in the army, the railways, on ships and the like. As Yamuna Sidiqi notes, 'Like Mathew's "nomads" who traversed London, they often wandered from country to country. This class was an imperial lumpen-proletariat, an underclass found throughout the colonial world, including Australia, India, and Africa'.[53] This underclass not only wandered from one country to another at will, but the imperial ruling class often used them as a workforce and fitted them anywhere in the world where they could be utilized. After 1857, when the Indian Naval Brigade was disbanded, many of these discharged sailors were disposed to form a naval brigade in China. In 1859, the secretary of the Sailor's Home assured the government about 'a number of ready hands available and suitable for such service in China'.[54]

After 1857, the European force was needed, especially in the frontier states. The imperial government could not feel confident without their presence. Specifically, from the imperial viewpoint, the tribes were not placed beyond

doubt. As observed: 'The European Company might be either stationed at Upper Assam, or half at Debrooghur and half in Central Assam (Tezpur) where there is generally some check required on the Bhooteas and other Tribes'.[55] It seemed difficult to form a European armed force within such a short period. The discharged seamen from the Naval Brigade refused to play the role of 'artillerymen'. The rate of pay of the seamen of the Naval Brigade was much higher than anywhere else. Colonel S.B. Hanny, who was commanding at Debroogarh, informed the government that 'none were willing to take service for two or three years as artillery men at the rates of pay of that branch of service, indeed this might have been expected, a great portion of the men being seamen who could earn from 3½ Pound to 4 Pound per mensem'. In Assam, during the stormy days, two parties of seamen each consisting of 100 Europeans were employed, which cost 15,709–12 rupees per month. After stability was regained, the local administration decided to reduce the force to one party of European seamen with three officers, which cost 5,618–98 rupees a month.[56]

The government wanted to cut costs by withdrawing the Naval Brigades who were highly paid. At the same time, it was not ready to leave any district without a European force. Especially the remote, riverine or hilly districts of eastern Bengal, which were difficult to access, were considered not safe to be denuded of European troops. In other words, 'native' troops were not to be left 'without a European soldier to overawe them'. The local administration of Dacca thought that a small yet significant body of European forces contributed greatly to the peace and stability that was regained. It was represented to the Lt Governor that, 'the novelty of the sight of a single European soldier was so complete that the effect produced by the presence of this small body of men was surprisingly great'.[57] While the imperial soul felt safe in the presence of a European force, the general public were alarmed by their presence. The administration tried to cover up the negative aspect of the whole affair tactically by diluting the intensity of the problem in their report. As stated:

> There were no complaints by the Town people against the men though quartered actually in the town; and it was pleasant to the Lieutenant Governor to see how well under the effects of good discipline the soldiers got on with the people, who had been a little alarmed, it is true.[58]

Like eastern Bengal, Bihar also faced the problem of replacing the Naval Brigade with European soldiers. In Patna, the district administration felt,

> it is utterly impossible that the Naval Brigade can go unless some other force be sent in its stead. I sincerely trust that whatever Force may be sent to relieve the sailors, it may be composed of Europeans, and not natives. To place guns under the sole charge of natives, would I think be a mistake.[59]

In Gaya, the commander-in-chief objected to the posting of troops at outstations. As a result, the Naval Brigade was retained, bearing the great

expense and accepting the bad reputations of the sailors, who were, 'a source of continued annoyance and fear to the people of the town and the district magistrate would be glad to get rid of them'.[60]

Sometimes, the 'uncivilized' and 'barbaric' attitude of the lower orders of the imperial body was exposed even before the 'native' community. Amritalal Basu – actor, playwright and theatre manager – wrote in his autobiography:

> Once the Mutiny of 1857 had cooled down a little in the western region, hordes of white men descended on Calcutta. This was the first time that the Highlanders landed in this country. People called them 'naked whites'. Places like the Fort, Dum Dum and Barrackpur could not accommodate all of them, hence they were put into houses in the neighbourhood of Queens College, Hindu College and the Free School. These white men were blood drinkers, and drunk on liquor, they were a positive nuisance and irritated many Calcuttans.[61]

He mentions an incident related to the problems posed by these people:

> One afternoon a band of drunken whites entered the house of Rani Rashmani. The sentries, failing to resist them, ran for their lives. The few officials who had been there also ran away. None of the babus were home then. The women in panic escaped to neighbouring houses across the terraces. … The white men entered the inner quarters of the house, but could not get to the room of worship, for then the men folk had returned home and sent information to the police and the Fort from where came in a battalion led by a sergeant, who drove out the white men. Drunken white men were a regular irritant on the Shyambajar streets.

In fact, the European soldiers engaged in suppressing the Great Rebellion created mayhem themselves quite often. After the Rebellion developed at the Barrackpur cantonment, the 'native' force there was disbanded and European troops were recruited for the first time. It was feared that the European soldiers would have 'opportunities of frequenting the Burra Bazar shops during the Daroga's absence', which led the brigadier to withdraw the licences; presumably, the shops were selling cheap liquor. Special arrangements were made to prevent looting and plundering of shops in the Burra Bazar area by European soldiers. An additional *mohurer* (clerk) was recruited to guard the shops at a cost of approximately 100 rupees per month, whereas the withdrawal of the licences would have caused a 'loss of 6000 Rupees'.[62]

It is interesting to note that serious measures and resources were needed to save public and private property from being vandalised by the 'saviours of empire'. William Howard Russell wrote in his diary about the rampaging soldiers – wild with fury, drunk and searching for riches to plunder and once in a while proffering salutes to their superiors from beneath their loads of plunders.[63]

Conclusion

Ashis Nandy has differentiated between two chronologically distinct modes of colonialism – the first being the physical conquest of territories, whereas the second was the conquest and domination of minds, selves and cultures.[64] It may be added that the presence of 'marginal' Europeans in India and the attitude of the elite towards them do not exactly conform to this chronology. As has been shown in many works, their presence, from soldiers and sailors to dress-makers and cooks, was rather small compared with the vast territory under European control, and the Empire could afford to pretend that they were 'undesirable' and 'avoidable' and tried to restrict their presence and movement in India. During the tumult, they had to fall back on their racial 'brothers' to ensure the physical safety of the empire and had to accept that they might be 'undesirable' but 'unavoidable'. For the conquest and domination of minds, selves and cultures and the creation of the image of a superior ruling race, i.e. the second phase of colonialism, the presence of the white 'vagrants', 'loafers' and 'prostitutes' and their like who did not know 'more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations'[65] did not conform to the ideal.[66] The Great Rebellion irrefutably established that a 'reserve force' had to be there for the stability and safety of the empire, yet this was its very source of weakness.

The marginals undermined the moral foundation of the empire, viz. the image of a 'superior race' encumbered with the 'white man's burden'. The authorities were helpless as they had to depend on them and, at the same time, control their 'unruly' behaviour, which ranged from loafing and begging to prostitution, robbery and murder. The imagined identification with the ruling race often emboldened them in their unruly activities. While the elite showed weakness, it was not kind either: a large number of soldiers and sailors recruited during the Rebellion were subsequently discharged and swelled the ranks of the destitute and depraved and led to the European Vagrancy Act of 1869. The question – whether these 'low Europeans' were a part of the ruling body or were aliens – hung heavily on the imperial mind. Moreover, the debate about whether their presence was useful and required or subversive to the empire went on long after 1857. It included efforts related to the adjustment and readjustment of the attitude to their presence and also measures to incorporate and institutionalize them in the 'imperial body'. As a prism that resolves sunlight into its seven components, the Great Rebellion showed the diverse hues of the imperial mindset in dealing with their 'lesser brethren'.

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Notes

1 'Colonization and Settlement in India', *The Calcutta Review*, 34 (67), 1860: 16–30.
2 Bengal Judicial Proceeding no. 59, 3 November 1857, West Bengal State Archives (hereafter WBSA).
3 Arnold (1983b: 133–58).
4 'Eurasians and Poor Europeans In India', *The Calcutta Review*, 72 (143), 1881: 41.
5 The 'adventurers' (a term applied in the days of the Company's commercial monopoly to every man who came out not in the service of the Company) cannot be omitted from the sketch of old Calcutta; for details, see Nair (1983: 219).
6 Judicial Criminal, 1821, 31 August, Proceeding no. 6, WBSA.
7 Extract from General Department, 17 September 1829, Judicial Criminal, 31 August 1821, WBSA.
8 In fact, in a minute of 1829, Bentinck had noted: 'Give us a hold in the country which we do not at present possess. We might now be swept away in a single whirlwind. We are without root'; Minute, 19 February 1829, Bentinck, in Philips (1977). Similarly, in 1829, Metcalfe, in his speech in the governor general's council, had warned: 'Our possession of India must be precarious, unless we take root by having an influential portion of the population attached to our government by common interests and sympathies' (Kaye 1855).
9 Roy (2007: 283–308).
10 Richards (1936: 88).
11 Reynolds (1937: 274).
12 *Calcutta Review*, 33 (40), 1859.
13 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 359, 10 September 1857, WBSA.
14 Basudeb Chattopadhyay, 'The Revolt of 1857 in Eastern India: An Overview' (unpublished).
15 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 55, 10 August,1857, WBSA.
16 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 943, 10 September 1857, WBSA.
17 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 775, 10 August, 1857, WBSA.
18 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 776/777, 10 August 1857, WBSA.
19 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 228, 17 September 1857, WBSA.
20 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 71, 5 November 1857, WBSA.
21 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 986, 10 August 1857, WBSA.
22 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 205, 10 September 1857, WBSA.
23 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 167, 3 December 1857, WBSA.
24 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 8, 5 November 1857, WBSA.
25 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 209, 17 December 1857, WBSA.
26 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 205, 17 December 1857, WBSA.
27 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 206, 17 December 1857, WBSA.
28 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 164, 10 December 1857, WBSA.
29 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 127, 24 December 1857, WBSA.
30 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 174, 10 December 1857, WBSA.
31 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 228, 17 September 1857, WBSA.
32 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 8, 3 December 1857, WBSA.
33 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 29, 26 November 1857, WBSA.
34 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 230, 17 September 1857, WBSA.
35 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 182, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
36 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 182, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
37 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 46, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
38 European Vagrancy Committee Report, Bombay, 1862, WBSA.
39 European Vagrancy Committee Report, Bombay, 1862, WBSA.
40 *The Friend of India*, 6 August 1868.

41 From the commissioner of police, Calcutta, to the secretary to the government of Bengal, no. 167, 25 February 1859, Bengal Judicial Proceedings 181, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
42 Mortality among European soldiers along with other low-profile Europeans in India seemed to pose a threat and challenge for the colonial authority. For a discussion on mortality among European soldiers, see Ewart (1859); Arnold (1986: 118–51).
43 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 181, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
44 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 183, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
45 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 182, 3 March 1859, WBSA.
46 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 136, 31 March 1859, WBSA.
47 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 136, 31 March 1859, WBSA.
48 *Bengal Harkaru*, 4 May 1859.
49 Bengal Marine Proceedings, 26 January 1859, WBSA.
50 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 25, 10 March 1858, WBSA.
51 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 65, 31 March 1859, WBSA.
52 Bengal Judicial Proceedings 65, 31 March 1859, WBSA. As Ridley (1983: 104) puts it: 'Anglo Indian Society and its ways are a fact of life, beyond criticism for its harshness, or its insensitivity. The Individual must measure up to it or be destroyed'.
53 Sidiqi (2006: 239).
54 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 48, 10 November 1859, WBSA.
55 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 71, 24 November 1859, WBSA.
56 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 74, 24 November 1857; the pay and allowances of 100 seamen and three officers cost 4,253–98 rupees, and the cost of their rations was 1,365 rupees, WBSA.
57 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 72, 3 November 1859, WBSA.
58 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 72, 3 November 1859, WBSA.
59 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 83, 14 April 1859, WBSA.
60 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 85, 13 April,1857, WBSA.
61 Basu (1982: 122–24).
62 Singha (1938: 63). 'As mentioned, last evening a group of white drunkards attacked the gatekeepers of the Lala Raja and pierced a few of them. The Rajas, in mortal scare, saved their skin by hiding in a well, like Hassan and Hossain'.
63 Edwardes (1957: 221). There was a subversive angle when it came to the people who were exposed to white soldiers. Thus, Richards (1936: 89) (a semi-contemporary account) mentions that the 'natives' believed that, when a British soldier died, 'his soul entered the body of a new born crow which made the crows so cunning and daring'.
64 Nandy (1983).
65 Kipling (1994: 15).
66 For European vagrants and loafers in the colonies, see Stoler (1995); De (2008). See also Arnold (1983a,b); Fischer-Tine (2005: 295–338).

10 Sanitizing indigenous memory

1857 and Mughal exile

Amar Farooqui

This chapter looks at the colonial policy of exile, in the context of the Mughals, in the post-1857 period. The policy was still evolving during the 1860s and 1870s, long after the Revolt had been suppressed, and was used very effectively in the 1880s when Thebaw, last king of Burma (Myanmar), was exiled to Ratnagiri following the third Anglo-Burmese war – the human dimension of which story has been explored with great sensitivity by Amitav Ghosh in his semi-historical novel *The Glass Palace*.[1]

Following the defeat of the 1857 rebels in Delhi, the British conducted a mock trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar. At the end of this so-called 'trial', the deposed Mughal emperor was exiled to Rangoon. Bahadur Shah's wife, Zinat Mahal, and his son from Zinat Mahal, Jawan Bakht, as well as a few other members of the immediate family of the former emperor were also banished to Rangoon. This marked the beginning of the erasure, by the colonial state, of an important icon of the Revolt. The Mughals were central, in symbolic terms, to indigenous discourses on 1857. The exile of Bahadur Shah, as well as of several other members of the imperial family, was a crucial element in the strategy of the colonial state to eliminate indigenous versions of the Revolt. The consequent forgetting was indispensable for establishing the authenticity of a sanitized colonial version of 1857.

The authenticity of the colonial narrative was in a large measure established by the sheer volume of published material that told the story of the Revolt exclusively from the point of view of the British. It was exceedingly difficult to challenge this narrative in the atmosphere of fear and terror that prevailed in the immediate post-1857 period. The silence of the colonized could only be broken in the context of a strong anti-colonial struggle, which occurred only at the beginning of the twentieth century. The publication of V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence* (1909) coincided with the Swadeshi Movement, and then, as we shall see, numerous works appeared in Urdu during the 1920s against the backdrop of the Khilafat Agitation and the Non-Co-operation Movement.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Hindustani-speaking north Indian intelligentsia, a large section of which had personally lived through the trauma of 1857–59, was unwilling publicly to question the colonial

version of the Revolt. Munshi Zakaullah's attitude, succinctly summed up by C.F. Andrews, was perhaps typical of the entire class in the post-Revolt era:[2]

> It was not easy for anyone in later years to get Munshi Zaka Ullah to talk much about the Mutiny itself, and the things he had witnessed then with his own eyes. The subject still had a horror for him. He always avoided it, except on very intimate occasions, when he had something special to say about it. Therefore it was chiefly from indirect hints and comments, in the course of many conversations, that I gathered from him much of the information which I am now about to record.

The information that Andrews managed to gather from Zakaullah, and chose to share with the reader, fills just a little over six pages and contains nothing spectacular. Nevertheless, from his comment on Zakaullah's feelings, we do get a glimpse of the world of private conversation. There might have been silence in the public arena, but the experience of 1857 was too intense to be entirely obliterated from conversations within an intimate circle. As this was a widely shared experience – cutting across class, caste, creed and region – and not confined to a few individuals, the intimate circle was in reality quite extensive.

There were several indirect ways in which indigenous memories could surface. Bahadur Shah as the nominal emperor was located at a specific historical conjuncture in which one of the most creative phases of Urdu literature and the events of 1857 came together in Delhi. Bahadur Shah's 'reign' of twenty years (1837–57) witnessed the coming of age of Urdu as a literary language with an exceptionally rich tradition of poetry. Delhi was the main centre of this development. This was the period that produced three towering figures of Urdu poetry: Ghalib, Momin and Zauq. Zafar was an important part of this literary circle. The two decades or so preceding the Revolt were also a period of hectic intellectual activity at the Delhi College, where a major experiment was under way in imparting knowledge of modern science and mathematics through the medium of Urdu.[3]

It is not surprising that, in the post-Revolt decades, the 'reign' of Bahadur Shah evoked nostalgia and a sense of loss among the Hindustani-speaking intelligentsia of north India. The Revolt marked the cataclysmic end of this era. What had been a cultural motif to begin with eventually became, through the association of Bahadur Shah's name with the Revolt and following the closure underlined by his exile, a political motif. By the end of the nineteenth century, this motif had found popular expression in the notion of the momentary flaring of the flame of the candle before it is finally extinguished. In the words of C.M. Naim,[4]

> The altered image of a last remaining candle about to go out was not only unambiguous in evoking a finality and doom, it simultaneously implied very strongly that life in the Delhi of the first half of the

> nineteenth century was not radically different from the days of the great Mughals, that it was illumined not by anything new but only by the last remaining candle of the multitude that had burned bright in the preceding three centuries, and that a radical and wide-ranging change took place only after the Revolt of 1857.

The '"candle" metaphor', to use Naim's phrase for the Zafar era and its unhappy ending, can perhaps be best understood by making a reference to the well-known Urdu novella of Mirza Farhatullah Beg (1884–1947) published during the early 1920s under the title *Dehli ki Akhri Shama*.[5] The theme of the novella is an imaginary *musha'ira* (gathering at which poets recite their compositions) held in Delhi during the closing years of Bahadur Shah's reign. The author visualizes the participation of all the leading Urdu poets of Delhi in this *musha'ira* – fifty-nine of them. These include Ghalib, Momin, Zauq, Azurda, Sahbai and Dagh. The heir-apparent Mirza Fakhru (1818–56), who had 'Ramz' as his *takhallus* (pen-name used by poets in the concluding couplet of the ghazal), is depicted as presiding over the *musha'ira*.[6] Zafar too honours the *musha'ira* by sending his poem that is read out with all the respect due to it. A *musha'ira* had its own elaborate protocol, which in this case was superseded by royal protocol. As the *musha'ira* is called to order, the audience is enjoined to be attentive to the emperor's ghazal:[7]

> At the words of the heralds all present at the mahfil settled down in the prescribed manner on folded knees and very deferentially lowered their heads. The King's page took out Badshah Salaamat's [His Majesty's] ghazal from a silk cloth case, kissed it, touched it to his eyes and began reading it in a resonant, melodious voice. The arrangement of the words, the excellence and aptness of language, the spontaneity of composition, and most of all, the voice of the reader threw everyone into a mood of enchantment, which seemed to hold heaven and earth in its grip. The audience was too entranced to applaud. The poets swayed in raptures of delight at every couplet.

Beg then reproduces a very popular ghazal of Zafar: *nahin ishq mein iska to ranj hamein ke qarar-o shakeb zara na raha/gham-e ishq to apna rafiq raha, koyi aur bala se raha na raha* ('I bemoan not the fact that my passion has robbed me of every shred of fortitude and repose/The woes and pangs of Love are my loyal comrades; I care not who else it is!').[8] The ghazal having been recited, it is handed over to Mirza Fakhru 'Ramz':[9]

> The lines of verse were written in His Majesty's own hand on gold-sprayed paper. The handwriting was so chaste and clear that it held the eye captive. Mirza Fakhru received the sheets and cast a look all round.

Bahadur Shah himself makes an appearance earlier on in the novella when preparations are in progress for the *musha'ira* and the blessings of the emperor are sought for its success.[10] The association of the emperor's name with the programme ensures that all leading poets will accept the invitation to participate in the *musha'ira*. Bahadur Shah offers personally to inform his ustad, Muhammad Ibrahim Zauq.[11] In other words, Bahadur Shah is fairly central to the narrative. The novella contains a wealth of historical information, including fairly accurate pen-portraits of poets, and is obviously based on a rich oral–written tradition about the cultural milieu of Delhi on the eve of the Revolt. *Dehli ki Akhri Shama* was a graphic representation in literary form of the mental picture that the Hindustani-speaking elite had of the world of Bahadur Shah. It was the loss of this world as a result of the Revolt and its aftermath that was mourned by the intelligentsia. Beg's exercise must be seen as an attempt to capture/depict a world that was already familiar to his generation from private conversations or from writings on the literary heritage of the Zafar era.

It is for this reason that Beg's work was selected by Khwaja Hasan Nizami for inclusion in his series on 'Delhi and the Ghadr of 1857'. Khwaja Hasan Nizami (c. 1878–1955) was the *sajjada nashin* (spiritual successor; custodian of the shrine) of the dargah of Nizamuddin Aulia, a prominent journalist and writer. In the early 1920s, he commenced the publication of a series of low-priced booklets in Urdu on the theme of 1857 in the context of Delhi. These are mostly compilations based on a variety of sources, including oral accounts. Some of the titles in this series are: *Begmat ke ansu* ('Tears of the Begums'); *Bahadurshah Zafar ka roznamcha* ('Diary of Bahadur Shah Zafar'); *Mirza Ghalib ka roznamcha* ('Diary of Ghalib'); and *Dilli ki saza* ('The Chastisement of Delhi'). Most of these had numerous reprints that continued to appear even after 1947. *Dehli ki Akhri Shama* was the eleventh in the series. It was first published in 1928 along with a lengthy preface by Nizami.

Beg had earlier published his piece in the Hyderabad periodical *Arzu* under the title 'San 1261 Hijri Mein Dehli ka Ek Mushai'ira' ('A Musha'ira held in Delhi in Hijri 1261, AD 1845').[12] When Nizami came across the novella, he was so fascinated by it that he immediately sought Beg's permission to publish it as part of his series on the Revolt with the modified, and more attractive, title *Dehli ki Akhri Shama*.[13] This became the most well-known booklet in Nizami's series. Its success must be attributed to its powerful evocation of the 'candle' metaphor, which in turn was central to the memory of 1857 and the rupture that the event represented. Beg was able to capture the world of private conversation with great accuracy.

Colonial officials of the latter half of the nineteenth century would have been aware of this world and the opinions voiced in it. At least in north India, indigenous memory symbolically associated the last Mughal emperor (and by extension, his exiled family) with the Revolt. The anxiety of the state to control indigenous memory led to it enforcing a rigorous policy of Mughal exile so as to prevent the emergence of a public political discourse focusing on Zafar's Delhi.

The Mughal family in exile

It was a measure of the success of the colonial state's attempts to render invisible the 'ex-royal family of Delhi' (as the Mughal family was referred to in post-1857 colonial records) that public interest in its fortunes waned rapidly during the 1860s. In any case, the brutal suppression of the Revolt would have ensured that no one was likely to take the risk of enquiring into the conditions of the royal family in distant Burma, or of establishing contact with it. There were, of course, popular legends about Bahadur Shah, the poet-king, composing melancholic verses in Rangoon, but there was little by way of *hard* information. After the demise of the 'ex-king of Delhi' in November 1862, colonial officials too lost interest in the family for the time being. One might mention that members of the exiled family continued to be classified as 'state prisoners' of the first rank – the principal 'state prisoners' of the British Indian empire – until the death, in the mid-1880s, of Jawan Bakht and Zinat Mahal.

Since its arrival in Rangoon towards the end of 1858, the imperial family had been kept in strict confinement, within the compound of the British military cantonment. Its presence in the city, or at least its precise location, was concealed from the local inhabitants as far as possible. There might have been vague rumours, but nothing specific seems to have been disclosed. This made it easier for Capt Nelson Davies, the official in charge of the royal prisoners, to carry out a quiet funeral of Zafar, burying his body in an unmarked grave. It was later remarked that, even though a handful of Muslims from the neighbourhood were allowed to be present at the funeral, they had no notion of its significance

> … this circumstance has been ascribed to the incredulity of the native population of Rangoon, who never could be brought to believe that the miserable and half-witted old man in confinement and exile was really the Ex-Emperor of Delhi whose predecessors had ruled all over India from Cabul to Cashmere and Cachar to Chittagong.[14]

In March 1870, James Talboys Wheeler, secretary to the chief commissioner of British Burma, took charge of the imperial family. Wheeler was a prolific writer of historical works and had a very serious interest in Indian history.[15] This would account for the greater sensitivity with which he went about his task as 'officer in charge of state prisoners, Rangoon', compared with his immediate predecessors. Wheeler immediately realized that the surviving members of the Mughal royal family had been utterly forsaken by colonial officialdom. Obviously, by this time, there was a consensus that there should be no reference to the family even in routine correspondence between Rangoon and Calcutta.

Within a month of assuming office, Wheeler drew the attention of the government 'to the wretched condition of the family'.[16] He followed this up

with a very detailed report, written in 1871, on the condition of the prisoners and put forward suggestions for enabling them to live with some dignity. There were at this time four state prisoners in Rangoon: Zinat Mahal, Jawan Bakht, Shah Abbas and Kochak Sultan.[17] Shah Abbas too was a son of Bahadur Shah. His mother, Mubarak-un-nisa Begum, was supposedly a concubine. Zinat Mahal, Jawan Bakht and Shah Abbas had, apart from Bahadur Shah, been expressly named in the government's transportation order of November 1858.[18] They were accompanied by Jawan Bakht's wife, Nawab Zamani Begum, and a few attendants. Zamani Begum and the attendants

> had made their own election to follow the state prisoners, after having been made clearly to understand that, while they remain with the Prisoners they will be subjected to precisely the same restraints as those which will be imposed upon the Prisoners themselves.[19]

This had constituted the original group of prisoners. As late as 1865, an addition was made to the list when yet another son of Bahadur Shah was exiled to Rangoon.[20] This was the unfortunate Mirza Kochak Sultan, who was condemned to even more obscurity than the other prisoners, as he does not figure in the original list and is therefore missing from historical accounts as well. The circumstances of Kochak Sultan's transportation illustrate the relentlessness with which the colonial state pursued its policy of obliterating popular memory of the Mughals. That Mirza Kochak was one of the surviving sons of Bahadur Shah made his exile all the more vital.

Kochak Sultan was captured along with numerous members of the royal family after the British reoccupied Delhi in September 1857, but managed to escape and remained in hiding until he was apprehended at Jaipur in 1862.[21] Kochak Sultan had initially been sheltered by Maulvi Sanaullah, father of Munshi Zakaullah. Sanaullah had been the tutor of the prince. According to C.F. Andrews, who learned of the incident from Munshi Zakaullah,[22]

> When the city was captured in the Mutiny, and the young prince's life was in great danger, Sana Ullah offered to make his own house into a harbour of refuge for the prince, though to do so might place the whole of his own family in imminent peril of death. But the young Mirza, who had a deep love for his old tutor and knew how great the risk would be, nobly refused to take advantage of his generous offer and thus bring upon the family almost inevitable disaster. The prince escaped by himself to Jaipur. …

Following his arrest, Mirza Kochak was immediately put on trial and convicted. The main charge brought against him was that he 'was appointed to the command of a regiment of mutineers … , and that he held the command for about a week'.[23] It was irrelevant for the purpose of this case that Kochak Sultan was just a lad of fifteen at the time of the Revolt. He was, as might

have been expected, summarily sentenced to transportation.[24] However, he languished, virtually forgotten, in the Delhi jail for three years before a decision was taken to send him to Rangoon.[25]

Colonial attitude of revenge

Most of Wheeler's 1871 report pertained to Jawan Bakht and his family (his wife and two children). Wheeler had spent quite some time interacting with Jawan Bakht and commented that, ever since the death of Bahadur Shah, Jawan Bakht 'has indulged in dreams of a restoration to the imperial throne; and notwithstanding all that I can say to the contrary, they still exercise an injurious effect upon his imagination which time alone can remove'.[26] Wheeler was of the opinion that the government should take steps to provide an English education for Jawan Bakht and his nine-year-old son Jamshed. He had already found a teacher for them, and urged the Calcutta authorities to sanction funds for this purpose.[27] Wheeler also recommended that funds be sanctioned to meet the marriage expenses of Jawan Bakht's eleven-year-old daughter.[28] He then dwelt upon Zamani Begum's condition at some length. The Begum was suffering from an eye ailment, 'and was slowly but surely losing the use of her eyes'. Wheeler suggested that Zamani Begum be permitted to go to Calcutta for treatment, accompanied by her husband. Jawan Bakht's 'period of leave' was to be 'strictly' limited to one month. Zamani Begum could stay on in Calcutta, while Jawan Bakht would have to return to Rangoon.[29] These recommendations were forwarded to the supreme government with the concurrence of the chief commissioner of British Burma.

What is significant is the response of the higher echelons of colonial officialdom, which typifies the overall attitude towards the imperial family. For instance, on the issue of Jawan Bakht's daughter, Calcutta was willing to make available a small grant of 1,000 rupees towards expenses for her marriage. Wheeler had recommended 2,000 rupees, a sum that was seen as extravagant by the Calcutta functionaries. A Foreign Department official underlined that it was not desirable 'to lend éclat' to the marriage and that the sooner the family sank 'into obscurity' the better it would be for everyone.[30] As for Zamani Begum's medical treatment, the government was willing to make the necessary arrangements and bear all expenses, although Jawan Bakht was not to be given permission to accompany her to Calcutta. C.U. Aitchison, secretary to the Foreign Department, was emphatic that the prince 'should on no account be allowed to leave Rangoon for a month'.[31]

Aitchison's stern instruction that Jawan Bakht should not be permitted to travel to mainland India was essentially intended to ensure that no opportunity was provided for encouraging gossip about the exiles. Sentiments that were dormant might be vaguely aroused if there was an occasion for exciting public curiosity about the fate of the surviving imperial family. Colonial officials knew that, at least in north India, indigenous memory symbolically associated the last Mughal emperor (and, by extension, his exiled family) with

the Revolt. This might have been reflected in private conversations, but the state was keen to prevent public comment so that its project for sanitizing indigenous memory was not undermined.

That Aitchison's concern was not entirely misplaced is apparent from a small episode mentioned in Wheeler's report. In 1863, Zamani Begum had been allowed to visit her mother and other close relatives in Jaipur and Delhi (her mother lived in Jaipur). According to the original schedule, she was to spend a whole year in Jaipur/Delhi. However, the visit was abruptly curtailed after about three months. Although there seems to have been no official record in the Rangoon files about the reasons that led to this sudden change in Zamani Begum's schedule, Wheeler had first-hand knowledge about what happened and furnishes the startling details in his report:[32]

> As I was Assistant Secretary in the Foreign Department of the Government of India at the time, and made the necessary arrangements for the journey of Zumanee Begum and her children to Delhi, I am enabled to explain from personal recollections. … When Zumanee Begum reached the Punjab, *her presence excited wild rumours amongst the people generally as regards the possible restoration of the Mughal dynasty*; and the Punjab Government deemed it expedient to send her back to Calcutta with all possible speed, and to recommend that she should be embarked at once for Rangoon, and never return at any future period excepting with the knowledge and approval of the Lt. Governor [emphasis added].

Although Zamani Begum lived on in Rangoon until her death in 1899,[33] she did not again undertake a journey to north India.

Invisibilizing the Mughals: the story of Mirza Ali Qadr

At the beginning of the 1870s, another part of the story of Mughal exile suddenly came to light. This was a story that seems to have been concealed so effectively thus far that senior colonial officials were themselves somewhat taken by surprise. In 1872, the House of Lords received a petition from a member of the royal family exiled in the remote Burmese town of Shwegyin.[34] The petition originated from Mirza Ali Qadr, a nephew of Bahadur Shah Zafar (Ali Qadr was a grandson of Akbar II and one of the sons of Zafar's half-brother Mirza Babar Bakhsh).[35] It stated that Ali Qadr had been transported to Burma presumably because he was in some way connected with the events of 1857 in Delhi. However, no specific charge had ever been brought against him, nor had his participation in the Revolt been established. More seriously, the government seemed to have more or less forgotten about his existence.

The petition, which was obviously drafted by the firm of London solicitors who had been entrusted with the responsibility of presenting it to the House of Lords, raised some important constitutional and legal questions, some of

them relating to issues of international law.[36] It began by pointing out that Shah Alam, Ali Qadr's great-grandfather, had granted the Diwani of 'the three great Provinces of Bengal, Behar, and Orissa' to the East India Company. Later, in 1803–4, the company had (following the occupation of Delhi) agreed to provide an annual pension to the emperor, while at the same time guaranteeing 'him his imperial titles and honour and his full sovereign power within the limits of the Royal Demesne, which consisted of the city and district of Delhi'. A small portion of this pension was earmarked for Ali Qadr's father.[37]

The petition then referred to the outbreak of the Revolt at Meerut and held the company partly responsible for what transpired subsequently: ' … the mutineers by the negligence of the East India Company, were allowed to arrive in Delhi'.[38] Further, that

> the anomalous position which the King of Delhi occupied with the consent and at the instance of the East India Company, was calculated to impress upon the minds of the people an idea of the perfect independence of the King of Delhi, and to give a character of belligerency to the military proceedings of the mutineers against the British forces … .

Moreover,

> the condition of belligerency so engendered and brought into effect by all the rules of international morality and justice, releases every individual who, from the force of circumstances, became subject to the insurgent power from every penalty or responsibility.

Given this situation, no individual could be 'held responsible or punishable for qualified or unqualified obedience to a *de facto* Government'.[39]

Nevertheless, Ali Qadr asserted that he had had nothing whatsoever to do with the rebels. According to him, he remained in hiding throughout the Revolt and, when British troops captured the city, 'was compelled and driven by the reckless and vengeful fury of the British Army to follow the steps of other fugitives to seek safety out of Delhi'.[40] He added:

> Of the various members of the royal family who lived within the precincts of the palace, many were killed, others who had surrendered were summarily shot without trial on the grave of your petitioners' ancestor, the Emperor Hoomayun, and, with one or two exceptions, all the males who were thought to be guilty of the least act of hostility to the British forces, were destroyed.[41]

Ali Qadr had surrendered at Panipat a few months later, was tried by a military commission and sentenced to transportation in June 1858. All that was held against him was that he was a member of the ex-royal family of Delhi,

and was present in Delhi during the Rebellion.[42] Ali Qadr was shifted to various locations, until he was eventually sent to Shwegyin, where he had been in exile since 1861.[43] He provides particulars of the suffering that he had to undergo due to 'successive periods of imprisonment with hard labour and chains passed in the several gaols of Agra, Allahabad, and Alipoor'. Ali Qadr, along with a number of his relatives, was then sent to the Andaman Islands. It was just a matter of chance that he had survived as 'several died on their way from the severity and terrible rigor of their imprisonment, and two more on their arrival in the said Islands'.

The petition ended with an implicit reference to the usurpation that British rule represented:

> Your petitioner, while submitting with resignation to the mutability of fortune which has brought down the house of Timoor, once the magnificent rulers of the Continent of India, and the proud rivals of the great monarchs of the West, to the position of pensioners and prisoners, cannot help feeling bitterly the hardship of his situation.[44]

The official correspondence that Ali Qadr's case gave rise to would suggest that, for more than a decade, the colonial state deliberately pursued a policy of making no public acknowledgement of the presence of several Mughal exiles in Burma, and perhaps elsewhere. There was certainly an attempt to maintain silence on this issue. It is likely that, after the departure of Lord Canning in 1862, not many senior civil servants might have had adequate information about the actual details of the dispersal of the imperial family. Yet the surfacing of Ali Qadr caused no embarrassment or pangs of conscience. Rather, it provided an opportunity to concretize a comprehensive hard-line policy towards the exiles. The policy was articulated by Aitchison, whose opinion on the petition is worth quoting at some length:[45]

> However insufficient the evidence may appear at this distance of time to bring individual guilt home to individual persons, it must be remembered that the conduct of the Delhi family as a body was so notoriously hostile, and their participation in the murders and atrocities perpetrated, particularly the cruel massacre of a large number of women and children in the palace [i.e. the Red Fort] was so general, that the two facts, 1st, of belonging to the family, and 2nd, having been in the city throughout the siege … were considered sufficient evidence to justify the inference that the person identified himself with the rebel cause.

Aitchison had little interest in the actual merits of the case. Being born into the Mughal family, and presence in the city at the time of the Revolt, implicated a person and justified exile. He was therefore strongly opposed to the petitioner's request to put an end to the exile. On the other hand, R.H. Davies, the then Lt Governor of Panjab, had categorically stated that 'there is

no such evidence of the petitioner having been concerned in the rebellion of 1857 as to warrant his further detention'.[46] Davies went even further and called for a comprehensive review of such cases as 'cases similar to that now under reference may exist of persons whom there is no longer any political necessity to detain, however expedient their detention may have been at the time'. He underlined 'the advisability of a review of the political cases in which any persons are under sentence of transportation by order of the Commissioners appointed in 1857–58 for the trial of state offences'.[47]

Aitchison immediately dismissed the suggestion and commented, 'I strongly deprecate any measure of this kind'. He obfuscated the details of the case when he stated that,

> The cases tried by the Commission were all carefully reviewed in 1860 by the Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab, and Sir John Lawrence, the Lt-Governor, and all the sentences requiring modification or reversal received it. Subsequently all who had been transported to Penal Settlements were released under the amnesty [of 1861], provided they did not belong to the excepted classes. Those whose return was considered dangerous, but who did not fall within the classes excepted from the amnesty, were detained in honourable exile and pensioned by Government.[48]

There are several inaccuracies in Aitchison's statement. Ali Qadr's case first came up for discussion only in 1861 when the superintendent of Port Blair wrote to Calcutta to enquire whether Ali Qadr was eligible for release under the amnesty for Andaman prisoners.[49] When the matter was referred at that time to the Judicial Commissioner of Panjab, he merely stated that Ali Qadr 'was proved to have been in Delhi during the rebellion', but added that he was not 'proved to have been actually a leader or instigator of the revolt'.[50] On the basis of this assessment, Canning had hurriedly ordered that Ali Qadr be shifted to 'a less penal place of custody'.[51] It was thus that he was sent to Shwegyin. The case was not re-examined or reviewed at any level, nor any fresh evidence produced, either in 1860 or even in 1861 (and certainly not in 1872–73). In other words, Aitchison suppressed the vital fact that the conviction and exile of Ali Qadr ultimately rested on the June 1858 judgement. From his point of view, there was no need to get involved in legal technicalities in this matter. The issue was a political one, and had to be decided accordingly. Continued exile of the Mughal family was politically necessary, because 'the return of these men now will simply unsettle people's minds. We have sufficient elements of disquiet in India already without adding this one to it'.[52]

The British government of India wrote back to the secretary of state in London that it was unwilling to allow the return of any Mughal exile, as this was likely 'to excite feelings and hopes now happily at rest and give rise among the people of Upper India to excitement and rumours dangerous to the public peace'. The Calcutta authorities firmly declared, 'As responsible for

the peace of the country we cannot consent to the return of Mirza Ali Kadr or any of the Delhi exiles'.[53] These were opinions that continued to be reiterated, with as much force, well into the 1880s.[54]

In the wake of the petition, enquiries were made to determine the exact number of such exiles. Prior to this, no attempt had been made to compile returns of state prisoners belonging to the Mughal family. It was discovered that there were nine surviving prisoners at various locations in Burma, besides the four at Rangoon. Two more had already expired. There were also two in Karachi.[55] These were exiles who were in receipt of small pensions of about 18–25 rupees per month from the local authorities (Zinat Mahal and Jawan Bakht were the only prisoners who received a relatively larger sum).[56] It is likely that there might have been other exiles who did not receive a pension and therefore did not figure in any record. Significantly, when the Rangoon authorities suggested that Zinat Mahal's pension be enhanced, Aitchison reminded them that Bahadur Shah's widow 'was believed to be the soul of rebellion in Delhi, and she made no attempt to save the poor women and children who were eventually massacred in the Palace and whom she could easily have saved had she liked'.[57]

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that there was a continuous underlying sentiment of revenge in the colonial attitude towards the remnants of the Mughal family. Nonetheless, there was more to British policy as it had evolved by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Mughal exiles were no political threat to an increasingly confident British empire, which had not just fully recovered from the setback of 1857 but was aggressively imperialist and racist by the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The ideology and myths that sustained the colonial state in this era, and were essential for its legitimation, required an authorized official narrative of the Revolt. This narrative in turn necessitated the suppression of the participants' view of 1857 to which the Mughals had been so integral. Through its uncompromising policy towards the Mughal family in exile during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the colonial state attempted to manage and control indigenous memory.

We need to bear in mind that even someone such as Munshi Zakaullah, who had been reconciled to British rule in the post-1857 period, and in his *Tarikh-i Hindustan* ('History of Hindustan') had written 'about the court of the Moghul emperor Bahadur Shah, in harsh terms', still had a strong emotional attachment to the Mughal family nearly half a century after the Revolt.[58] Zakaullah's attitude is summed up by Andrews and is illustrative of the feelings of the educated elite of north India towards the Mughal family. 'His devoted loyalty', Andrews writes,

> to the Emperor's person … was noticeable throughout his [Zakaullah's] long life. … Out of this intense reverence for Bahadur Shah, even in his

> downfall, he received as a guest at a later date, when the Moghul house was in ruins, the daughter of Mirza Baber [Ali Qadr's sister]. … She had already reached old age when he welcomed her with reverence into his own household for protection, giving her the apartments that his own mother had occupied, and treating her as a royal guest. Whenever he undertook any journey or began some fresh undertaking, the first thing he did was to make obeisance to this Moghul Princess and ask for her benediction.[59]

Bahadur Shah remained a potent symbol, not so much in terms of the possibility of this symbol being used for political mobilization, but because of the challenge it posed to the colonial narrative of the Revolt.

Notes

1 Ghosh (2000: 65–176).
2 Andrews (2003[1929]: 61).
3 See Pernau (2006: 1–32).
4 Naim (2003: 6).
5 Beg (1949[1928]). This has been translated into English by Akhtar Qamber as *The Last Musha'irah of Dehli* (1979). Qamber has also written a useful introduction, although he does not provide information on the publication history of the text. All references, unless otherwise specified, are to Qamber's translation.
6 The ghazal is a short lyric comprising couplets, and has been the most favoured poetic form at *mushai'ras*.
7 *Last Musha'irah*, p. 71.
8 Beg (1949[1928]: 55); *Last Musha'irah*, pp. 71–72.
9 *Last Musha'irah*, p. 72.
10 *Last Musha'irah*, pp. 43–46.
11 *Last Musha'irah*, p. 45.
12 Beg (1949[1928]: 5).
13 Beg (1949[1928]: 6).
14 7 March 1871, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI), Foreign Department (hereafter FD), Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
15 Wheeler's extensive published work included a several volume history of India from the earliest times, a history of the Madras presidency and an account of the Delhi darbar of 1877.
16 See 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
17 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
18 13 November 1858, NAI, FD, Pol. 10 December 1858, no. 60.
19 13 November 1858, NAI, FD, Pol. 10 December 1858, no. 60.
20 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
21 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26; 26 April 1865, NAI, FD, May 1865, nos 53–54.
22 Andrews (2003[1929]: 50–51).
23 7 May 1862 and 14 May 1862, NAI, FD, May 1865, no. 54.
24 7 May 1862 and 14 May 1862, NAI, FD, May 1865, no. 54.
25 6 May 1865, NAI, FD, May 1865, no. 65.
26 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
27 Wheeler's attempt to make arrangements at the local Diocesan school for the education of Jamshed was unsuccessful on account of the vicious hostility of the

expatriate community: 'In the first instance I selected the Diocesan school as the best in Rangoon for the object contemplated, and also because the new master, Mr Croley, can speak Hindostanee, and I was anxious that the little boy should be educated with Europeans and Eurasians rather than with Natives. But although I am a member of the Board of the Diocesan School, I found myself warmly opposed by those parents who had children at the school; and was assured that many parents would remove their boys if a native child were introduced, even when that child was the last legitimate representative of the Mogul Emperor of Hindoostan. Finding it useless to contend against such a feeling, I have arranged that Mr Croley should give private lessons to Jumsheed Bukht out of school hours; but even before concluding this arrangement I deemed it necessary that he should have the permission of all the parents, which after some correspondence has been finally obtained'. 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.

28 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
29 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
30 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
31 NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
32 7 March 1871, NAI, FD, Pol. A, June 1871, no. 26.
33 4 July 1899, NAI, FD, Int. B, August 1899, no. 283.
34 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
35 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94. Mirza Babar Bakhsh was the second son of Akbar II from his favourite wife Mumtaz Mahal. He was projected as the heir-apparent after the death of his (Babar's) elder brother Mirza Jahangir in 1821. However, Babar Bakht died in 1825. For more details on Babar Bakht, see Spear (2002: 64–65).
36 The British Indian government seems to have been initially rattled by the petition and made enquiries about the manner in which Ali Qadr had been able to communicate with the outside world. Among those who were questioned was George James Cooper, the honorary assistant surgeon attached to the Civil Medical College at Shwegyin. Cooper had certified that Ali Qadr's petition 'was carefully interpreted and explained' by him to the petitioner, and his name appeared at the end of the petition. To the government's query about his connection with the memorial of Mirza Ali Qadr he replied: 'I have no connection directly or indirectly, with the memorialists in question. The memorials were presented to me by Mirza Ultuff [Altaf] and Mirza Ali Kadr, who received the same from A.R.C. Sunders, Esq., Solicitor, an agent of theirs in 17-A, Great George Street, Westminster, London; and whilst they were attending the Civil Dispensary they asked me if I would be good enough to explain to them the contents of the memorial, which I did so, to the best of my ability, and as requested by the above I signed the memorials simply to show that the contents of the same was explained to them by me'. Nevertheless, further research is required to establish the history of the presentation of the petition.
37 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
38 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
39 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
40 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
41 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
42 18 June 1858, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 97.
43 See NAI, FD, Pol. I, October 1883, no. 21, K.W., no. 2.
44 24 April 1872, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 94.
45 NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, nos 94–116.
46 14 January 1873, NAI, FD, Pol. A, no. 96.
47 14 January 1873, NAI, FD, Pol. A, no. 96.
48 NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, nos 94–116.

49 9 August 1861, NAI, FD, Part B, August 1861, no. 219.
50 28 June 1861, NAI, FD, Part B, August 1861, no. 218.
51 4 August 1861, NAI, FD, Part B, September 1861, nos 560–61.
52 NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, nos 94–116.
53 7 February 1873, NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 116.
54 22 April 1883, NAI, FD, Pol. I, October 1883, no. 21.
55 NAI, FD, Pol. A, February 1873, no. 101.
56 2 July 1873, NAI, FD, Pol. A, August 1873, no. 230.
57 25 July 1873, NAI, FD, Pol. A, August 1873, no. 230.
58 Andrews (2003[1929]: 32).
59 Andrews (2003[1929]: 32).

11 Ideas, memories and meanings

Adi Dravida interpretations of the impact of the 1857 Rebellion

Raj Sekhar Basu

The Rebellion of 1857 has essentially been viewed as a north Indian affair, with the regions south of the Vindhyas remaining unusually calm. Such thinking has its basis in the ideas that have been transmitted to generations of students of history by textbooks and other historical writings vis-à-vis the anti-British struggle in India. It is perhaps in this light that the very issue of Madras being the 'benighted province' remains to be explored. In his much celebrated work on the developments relating to the Rebellion, Surendra Nath Sen has observed that the Madras presidency had remained unaffected all through, despite some slight signs of disaffection that afflicted the army.[1] The 'native' literati in Madras were also said to have been on the side of law and order and were believed to have been forthright in denouncing the uprising in unambiguous terms.

However, a different version was upheld in the resolution published by the judicial department of the government of Madras on 3 September 1857, wherein it was observed:

> Hyderabad is always inflammable and was sure to be deeply excited. … Our Provinces of Kurnool, Cuddapah and Malabar contained a large Musalman population which would participate in these feelings, and at Madras itself and the towns of Arcot, Vellore and Trichinopoly animosity was felt in consequence of extinction of the Nawabship of the Carnatic … Prominent notice was drawn to the Native Community by the press. The proceedings of Government in its General Administration, as well as in Military and Political matters, and the supposed discontent caused thereby, especially among our Native Soldiery, were largely descanted upon, our want of it was observed, strength was pointed out and most injudicious subjects were discussed. Thus one newspaper entered into lengthened arguments to prove that greased cartridges of objectionable materials had really been issued … another turned into derision Sir H. Lawrence's address to the Troops at Lucknow, and published a supposed speech form the mouth of a Sepoy in refutation of it. These publications, unfortunately, do not reach English readers only. They are republished in Vernacular newspapers and thus have a deleterious effect on the Native

> Community. The policy of annexing native States on the failure of lineal male heirs may in particular be noticed as having been discussed in very inflammatory language.[2]

More recently, this sort of opinion has evoked interesting responses from historians working on colonial south India. N. Rajendran has argued that, despite the fact that colonial consolidation had taken place in large parts of the presidency, including the Tamil-speaking districts, the region as a whole from the late eighteenth until the end of the first half of the nineteenth century had been witness to resistance directed against the East India Company's government. These acts of resistance primarily emerged from the Company's attempts to impose its unquestioned political supremacy over the region. Indeed, this tradition of resistance had been witnessed during the Anglo-Mysore wars, the Poligari uprisings, the Vellore mutiny of 1806 and the disaffections in the Madras 'native' army in 1857–58.[3]

The present chapter intends to explore in detail the developments in the Tamil-speaking regions of the erstwhile Madras presidency before and during the Rebellion of 1857. It will try to project a narrative of events, which could highlight the fact that the situation in the Tamil districts was by no means tranquil and there were instances of strong opposition, if not rebelliousness, on the part of the 'native' inhabitants to the Company's government. In some cases, these elements of protest could be related to incidents of resistance, which had found expression in the Vellore mutiny of 1806. However, it will be argued that such a 'grand narrative' often over-rules the other dimensions and interpretations of events. It will be pointed out that the ex-untouchable communities such as the Adi Dravidas had their own ways of interpreting the Rebellion of 1857. Such communitarian versions of the past seek to marginalize the hegemonic dominance of 'nationalist culture' and 'nationalist civilization' in their quest to unearth the hidden implications of caste, identity and territory.

The resentment among the Indian sepoys: the Madras 'native' army in the early nineteenth century

Since its formation in the middle of the eighteenth century, the Madras army had faced points of crisis and success. Despite the success of the sepoy battalions in quelling local insurrections and incursions on the part of the Mysore army, problems persisted regarding the enforcement of discipline and dress codes. Indeed, all these played some part in the Vellore mutiny of 1806. The decision to introduce a new turban is often singled out as an important factor that might have incited the 'native' sepoys to rebel against their European superiors. This decision to introduce a new turban as part of the sepoy's attire was not an innovation, but rather part of a process that had been initiated long before. Highly placed military officials such as Craddock could not anticipate that this new turban would arouse such strong feelings

among the army's Indian troops. The sepoys of the 2/4th Native Infantry were the first to notice that the new turban resembled a drummer's *topi* (cap). Some of them felt that the new turban was part of a deliberate British ploy to undermine the social status of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys. The Indian sepoys believed that, if people saw them wearing the new turban, there would be hardly any marriage proposals for them from possible suitors. Some of the sepoys received threats from their wives that they would stop cooking for them or would not share their bed if they wore the foreigners' hat. Indeed, such gossip and threats played on the mindset of the soldiers recruited from the middling castes of the south Indian peasantry. Colonel Fancourt, who commanded the Vellore cantonment, tried to curb the rebellious spirit of the sepoys of the 2/4th Native Infantry by entering into negotiations with them. Nonetheless, he did admit that there had been a mutiny according to the technical language of the Articles of War, which classified every refusal to obey orders, no matter how trivial, as a mutiny. Fancourt decided to proceed with a formal investigation of the disturbance. British military officials such as Darley put the blame squarely on the 'native' officers for the mutiny. However, his arguments were nullified by the Madras Army Court of Enquiry. Two hapless sepoys were selected for court martial in Madras, and Darley escaped with a stern reprimand. There was an expectation that such a policy would uphold both the chain of command and military authority, and protect the honour of the 2/4th Native Infantry. On 10 July 1806, the sepoys of the Vellore garrison armed themselves and attacked the British officers and European troops stationed in the fort. One hundred officers and British soldiers were killed, and many others were wounded. But the mutineers failed to establish their complete hold over the fort, which proved to be the main cause of their debacle. The recapture of the fort by the British dragoons and the Indian cavalry from Ranipet led to huge loss of life.

The disturbance in the Madras native army in the late 1850s is often linked to the Vellore mutiny that had taken place in the early years of the nineteenth century.[4] Serious studies on the Vellore mutiny began with John Malcolm's *Sketch of the Political History of India*, which was published in 1811 prior to the crucial debate in the English parliament regarding the extension of the East India Company's royal charter. This work, as has been argued, 'transformed the oral traditions of the Madras Army into a formal text, laying the foundation of an idealized image of the relationship between British officers and Indian sepoys'.[5] Malcolm held the opinion that the decline of the Madras army could be traced back to the Cornwallis reforms of 1796, which had increased the number of European officers in the sepoy battalions. The young officers, unfamiliar with Indian customs and sensibilities, were quick in wresting away the privileges and responsibilities that had formerly belonged to the Indian non-commissioned and commissioned officers. The British officers, however, lacked ability in developing the cultural sensitivity and language skills needed for commanding the Indian troops. Their alienation from the Indian officers led to a greater degree of complications. In his correspondence

with the Madras government, Malcolm thus observed, 'the system on which [the army] is at present arranged is of the cold, confined, and depressive nature that it cannot … fail, if not radically amended, of some day bringing a misfortune on the state'.[6]

Malcolm's personal impressions on the Vellore mutiny contained interesting insights. His involvement with a sepoy battalion as a young officer had given him an opportunity to explore the Indian attitudes towards the Company's Raj. His middle class, marginalized Scottish background led him to adopt a critical view towards the Company's policies in British India. He did endorse the Indian grievances vis-à-vis the Raj, even if he did not support them wholly. Interestingly, many of the essential points of Malcolm's arguments found a place in the first edition of James Mill's *History of British India*, which was published in 1819. Mill pointed out that the sepoy discontent in Vellore resulted from an irrational fear of Christian missionary activities.[7] The inability on the part of the sepoys to demarcate the lines of politics and religion encouraged them to place the European military officers and the missionaries on an equal footing. In drawing up such ideas, there was perhaps an overemphasis on the European fiction that the majority of Indians were guided by religion in their secular pursuits – helping them to construct order amid the apparent chaos characterizing the contemporary Indian polity.

In the years immediately following the Great Rebellion of 1857, John William Kaye provided an analysis of the Vellore mutiny based largely on Malcolm's ideas. Kaye delved into the issues of race and caste, which had found little importance in Malcolm's writings. He argued strongly that Brahminism had been the most oppressive system in the world and that it had been maintained only by ignorance and superstition of the grossest kind. This had been going on for several centuries, as the progress of enlightenment had been too slow and its manifestations unobtrusive, so as to raise alarms in the sacerdotal mind. But, the situation changed when the orthodox defenders of Brahminism realized the implications of the Christian approach. In other words, they perceived Christianity as a challenge to the continuance of all that Hinduism stood for in India.[8]

While he was inclined to view the Indian sepoy as an irrational being, he did nevertheless emphasize the elements of threat to the sepoy identity in the context of British India's military culture and the indigenous systems of belief and social standing. Such ideas later found a place in the writings of Philip Mason and Ranajit Guha. In his writings, Guha asserted that the differences in race, religion, language and custom that separated the colonizer and the colonized were promptly assimilated within the security concerns of the colonial state. This exercise, mired in a veil of ignorance, actually prevented the ruling classes from interpreting what has been described as a 'prose of counter-insurgency'. All this imparted to the phenomenon of isolation an unmistakeably disciplinary slant in colonialist historiography and reduced it to one of fear. This fear in the true Heideggerian sense originated in a clearly specified region – 'namely the civil society of the subject population and the

equally specific object to which the harm is addressed, that is the Raj'.[9] Robert Frykenberg's study of the Vellore mutiny bears a lot of similarity to the ideas of Malcolm and Kaye, despite the fact that he does not acknowledge the influence of either of them.[10]

The nationalist historians favoured the idea that an extensive and potentially powerful anti-British conspiracy lay behind the Vellore mutiny. The idea that British rule was confronted by secret foes was particularly appealing to them, as they sought to uncover links between the early colonial resistance to British rule and the twentieth-century nationalist movement. Rajayyan and Chinnian presented a nationalist interpretation of the Vellore mutiny – which in their opinion was tinged with regional chauvinism of the modern Tamil movement.[11] Rajayyan's idea of a popular anti-British conspiracy seems also to have influenced historians such as Susan Bayly, who characterized the Vellore mutiny as 'a dramatic but short-lived "Islamic" warrior's insurgency'.[12] In short, Bayly argues that the Vellore affair was a full-scale insurrection, a dress rehearsal for the Great Rebellion of 1857.

In a more recently published work, Channa Wickremesekera touches on the Vellore mutiny in a more general discussion on the early sepoy mutinies. He observed that, although a strong mercenary spirit seemed to have influenced the sepoy army, the mutiny of the Indian troops since the last years of the eighteenth century seemed to have stemmed from religious causes. At the same time, he also argues that the lesser disturbances in the Madras army were related to the 'deep seated grievances relating to intolerable service conditions like low pay and excessive drill'.[13]

The rebellious incidents in 1857–58

Significantly, there have been attempts to offer a new narrative on the disturbances that afflicted the Company's battalions posted in different parts of south India in the wake of the rebellious incidents that rocked the Gangetic plains in 1857–58. In fact, historians have often tried to relate these incidents to the tradition of resistance that was present in the region since the last decades of the eighteenth century. They have tried to construct a 'grand narrative' based on a few records preserved in the Tamilnadu State Archives at Chennai. It has been argued that these records present a different story of developments, which had been overlooked for a long period by the influential nationalist historians. In his writings, N. Rajendran has pointed out that 1,044 sepoys of the Madras army were court-martialled for their brazen sympathy or support for the Rebellion. Further, the Rebellion of 1857 was an important symbol of nationalist mobilization in the region. The pro-British mouthpieces deliberately obliterated this real side of the story, and the views of particular individuals utterly critical of the developments came to be justified in the name of an entire social grouping.[14]

The resolution of the judicial department of the government of Madras, dated 3 September 1857, has been cited as proof of the fact that south India

was passing through a period of political uncertainty during the initial months of the Great Indian Rebellion. The city of Madras, contrary to the earlier descriptions, wore an uneasy appearance. In the Triplicane area, the display of public sentiments aroused a great deal of apprehension in the minds of the colonial bureaucracy. Subsequently, the city came to be guarded by military posts, and many Europeans enrolled themselves in the volunteer corps. The British administration in Madras was also cautioned by the office of the governor general about the disaffection that could arise among the ordinary citizenry following the circulation of certain seditious proclamations.[15] In the course of such assertions, Rajendran highlights the fact that, apart from Madras, the adjoining districts such as Chingleput and far interior areas such as Coimbatore also bore signs of disturbances. The district of North Arcot was said to have witnessed secret parleys, and one Syed Kussa Muhammad Augurzah Hussain was said to have incited the *zamindars* of Chittoor and Vellore to rise up against English misrule. This plan failed to take shape, and Kussa was apprehended and kept under tight security.[16]

In Vellore, it has been pointed out that there were signs of rebellion within the ranks of the British army. Some of the sepoys of the 18th Regiment were believed to have been restive in November 1858, resulting in the death of two English officials. The sessions judge of Chittoor sat in the trial of a recalcitrant sepoy who was accused of murdering Captain Hart and Jailor Stafford.[17] At the end of the trial, the judge passed the death sentence on the accused. But, compared with Vellore, the incidents in Salem, Coimbatore and Chingleput were mostly the products of rumours and stories of conspiracies that were hatched by the rebellious groups. In Coimbatore, a section of the population seems to have been influenced by the chief of a mutt, Sanyasi Mulbagalu Swamy, who preached that British rule was slowly coming to an end. His followers were made to believe that European rule had to be destroyed and had to be replaced by the rule of Peshwa Nana Sahib.[18] This move was also foiled, and the Swamy was captured by the British at Bhavani and sent to Coimbatore jail.

Chingleput was the centre of a series of secret parleys and revolutionary activities. A rebel, Sultan Baksh, was supposed to have travelled from Madras to Chingleput and organized an anti-British uprising with the co-operation of some local inhabitants. The uprising was said to have started on 31 July 1857 and thereafter spread to other areas.[19] Such was the intensity of the disturbances that the magistrate of Chingleput was forced to correspond with the government of Madras at Fort St George as to the measures that could be initiated for stalling this bout of insurgency. These incidents cited by Rajendran in his study attempt to convince a section of the educated Indian society of the implications of nationwide participation in the Rebellion. This is simply not perceived as a development that was confined to the Gangetic heartland and parts of central India, but one that had reverberations in other regions as well. Implicit in such a narrative is an underlying assumption that almost all regions of the subcontinent displayed sympathies and support for

the rebels. The regions experienced the same sort of colonial exploitation, and it is this shared feeling of misrule that made 1857 not just a regional affair but a nationwide anti-British struggle.

Exploring the reasons for 'disaffection' in the Madras army

However, there are other narratives on the Rebellion of 1857 and its impact on south India. In a book entitled *The History of the Indian Revolt and Expedition to Persia China and Japan*, it has been stated that the 8th Cavalry was ordered to march from Bangalore to Madras and then embark for Calcutta. On 17 August 1857, reaching a place about twenty-five miles from Madras,

> the men put forward a claim for the rates of pay; batta and pension which existed before 1857. … such a moment was perplexing to the officers. They … obtained the consent of the Government to make conciliatory efforts to the men. After a further march of 13 miles … the troopers again stopped and declared they would not … war against their countrymen.[20]

This was clearly an act of protest, and the 8th Cavalry was promptly disarmed, leading to a great deal of excitement in Madras. Subsequently, a letter written by a highly placed British military commander from Nagpur also highlighted the protest that had been waged by the Madrasi sepoys posted in central India. The military official wrote:

> the sympathies of the Madrasi sepoys were entirely with the insurrectionary movement and if they had got a tempting opportunity they would have joined it. They only want a beginning to be made and a rallying point of some sort … we must never … suppose that Madras men are different clay from those of Bengal.[21]

In 1858, the *Quarterly Review*, displaying a tone of racial bias, observed that

> the sepoys of the Madras Army have not revolted is simply because the Tamul [sic] races to which they belong have no literature, no traditions or none worthy of the same, no pride of ancestry, no country in fact and no caste.[22]

This stereotypical image was also projected in the writings of journalists such as Henry Mead.[23] Indeed, such narratives might claim to provide details of the 'mindset' of the Indian military personnel in Madras, but they rarely delve deeper into the complexities of the situation. In more recent times, questions of caste, the memories of the 'low born' and that of Tamil valour are gaining strength.

The debates over the involvement of the Paraiyans – a community considered to be untouchable in the past – have been raising a storm in the intellectual circles of Madras. The entry point to all such discussions has been the way in which the modern Indian army has been presented to the Indian citizenry. The idea of the modern Indian army has very rarely been associated with the Tamils. The nature of its ethnic composition tended to give the impression that it was composed mainly of north Indians. This impression has been so strongly established that the military history of the British Empire is too often linked to the achievement of the 'martial races' of north India who had found employment in the British Indian Army. David Washbrook has thus observed,

> the role British Indian Army played in international affairs over the course of the nineteenth century however, lifts it out in the context of the British Indian relations and places it in a broader global perspective. It was not an army intended primarily for domestic defence and police duties in India. Rather it was the army of British imperialism formal and informal, which operated worldwide, opening up markets to the products of Industrial Revolution, subordinating labour forces to the domination of capital and bringing to 'benighted' civilizations the enlightened values of Christianity and Rationality. The Indian army was the iron fist in the velvet glove of Victorian expansionism. Moreover, because the British Empire was the principal agency through which the world system functioned in this era, the Indian Army was in a real sense the major coercive force behind the internationalization of industrial capitalism. Paradoxically (or not!) the marginalization of North Indian society and in many ways the feudalization of its agrarian relations were direct corollaries of the development of capitalism on a world scale during the nineteenth century.[24]

Such views are essentially based on what the Indian Army was towards the end of the nineteenth century. It was linked to an impression that had influenced the British mind long after colonialism had established its unquestioned supremacy over the Indian subcontinent. By now, it is fairly well known that the British Empire's foundation in this region rested exclusively on the military achievements of the coastal army of south India composed mainly of the 'short statured' Tamil soldiers. In the late eighteenth century, the vision of empire building did not loom around the idea that this task had to be achieved by mobilizing the dominant north Indian communities basking with military glory, but the route to success lay in building up a cheap, loyal and effective army based on the recruitment of Tamil soldiers.[25]

In fact, Tamil militarism is often linked to the successes of the warring castes such as the Maravas. However, the 'native' soldiers were also recruited from other caste groups such as the Vellalas, Nadars and Adi Dravidas. Under the active patronage of the British, the Vellalas had established their

dominance, and their culture assumed a representative and hegemonic form in Tamil society. The Nadars and the Adi Dravidas had displayed their inclinations towards conversion, and a large number of them had accepted the tenets of Protestantism. The recruitment base of the Indian Army was strongly constituted in favour of these groups. Indeed, as early as 1795, it had been observed that 'owing to the small pay of the sepoy and the high price of rice, considerable difficulty was experienced in obtaining good recruits, and the battalions were kept up to their proper strength by accepting undersized men and those of low caste'. Historians such as Douglas M. Peers have argued that, by the early years of the nineteenth century, 'the army of Bengal had taken on several characteristics which distinguished it from the armies of Bombay and Madras. Most obvious of these was its homogeneity, for recruitment in Bengal was almost exclusively from the higher castes'. In Madras, a more heterogeneous approach was used with no single religion or caste amounting to more than 50 per cent of the army's total, and moreover, within individual regiments, efforts were made to prevent the emergence of any single dominant group. In Bombay, the British authorities went even further and deliberately encouraged the recruitment of marginal castes and cultures to create what one Bombay officer described as a 'most salutary mixture of castes'. Low castes were actively encouraged to join, and Malabar Jews were recruited as 'native' officers.

In one of the recruitment handbooks, it was explicitly stated that the coast army had been instrumental in conquering India for the British. The Tamil soldiers, more popularly known as *Thambis* (younger brother), had few religious and caste prejudices, which made them suitable for expeditions beyond the sea unlike their brethren from north India.[26] What emerges from such accounts is that the early phase of British overseas expansion was not based on the martialization of north Indian society, but on the south Indian alternative to its military labour market – the 'loyal' classes of Tamils. The Tamil soldiers played an important role in many of the successful expeditions, including Manila (1762), Mahe (1779), Ceylon (1782 and 1795), Amboyna and the Spice Islands (1796), Egypt (1801–2), Bourbon and Mauritius (1810) and Java (1811–12). The coast army was also involved in the expedition against the King of Kandy, which was followed by the First Burmese War (1824–26). The British involvement in China in the early 1840s also witnessed the deployment of the 37th Madras Infantry.[27]

A closer look into the history of the coast army and the processes of recruitment of Tamil soldiers reveals beyond all doubt that the military agency that enabled the expansion of British capitalist power to different areas of the world (including the South Asian hinterland) had a very small proportion of north Indian military troops. There seems to be some truth in Washbrook's argument that the Company's officials did employ some of the north Indian caste groups in laying the foundations of their empire in South Asia. This strategy was more evident in the 1870s when military officials such as Sir Lepel Griffin employed the 'martial race' theory to induct a larger

number of Sikhs, Gurkhas and Jats to enforce more loyalty and discipline in the army. Undoubtedly, such moves stalled much of the employment opportunities for the 'lower caste' groups in the military establishment. The Tamil Paraiyans were the worst affected, and their presence rapidly dwindled in the military departments other than the Miners and Sappers Unit of the Madras army.

The recruitment of Tamil soldiers to the Company's army began sometime around the middle of the eighteenth century. The conflict with the French in the Carnatic influenced the Company's top officials to experiment with the idea of raising an army of their own. Unlike the great Indian princedoms, the Company found it difficult to recruit soldiers from the upper caste 'martial' groups. The records of the Company's military establishment in the 1770s and 1780s tend to give the impression that the sepoy battalions were essentially composed of Muslims, Tamils and Telugus. As late as the 1920s, H. Dodwell, the then curator of the Madras Records Office, had observed: 'In 1765 the Military Regulations were printed; but no copy so far as is known has survived. However it is likely that they contained little to our present purpose, beyond a general restriction of recruitment within "the proper castes"'.

The earliest definition of what the proper castes were seems to be the one in the form of an army order that emphasized the policy of confining recruitment as far as possible to the Rajputs, Muslims and three Telugu castes – the Kammavaru, the Razu and the Velama Varu. Dodwell referred to one of the resolutions of the Madras Council, wherein it had been observed:

> At the present the sepoy battalions are composed of men of different sects or religions on which account they cannot be supposed to be so attached to each other as if each battalion were composed of men of the same sect or religion. It is proposed that each of the sepoy battalions be formed of men of the same caste, either Mussalman, Malabars, or Gentoos, which it is presumed may not only be productive of greater attachment and harmony among the sepoys of the same battalion, but also may create a spirit of emulation among the several battalions.[28]

In fact, the composition of the various Madras sepoy battalions depended entirely upon the accidental caste of the recruits who presented themselves for enlistment in the various regiments and upon the equally accidental results of the extensive drafting that took place on the formation of new battalions. Thus, by a general order of the commander-in-chief of 1839, it was laid down that 'all natives are eligible for enlistment without reference to caste, provided they are in all other respects perfectly fit for the service'. After this, however, a new tendency set in. It was resolved to recruit in equal proportions from four main classes – Tamil, Telugus, Muslims and men of lower castes. But even then, it was not intended to group any of these in any particular regiment, but there were attempts to divide them equally within all the battalions. But, there are hardly any details on the caste composition of the Indian soldiers in the Company's

battalions stationed in south India. The numbers of Brahmins, Rajputs and Marathas were comparatively small in the Madras army.[29] The authorities also seemed to have favoured the enlistment of men of good castes, despite the fact that it had not been practicable during the late eighteenth century.

The British military officials who were known for their voluminous tracts on the Madras army also seem to have been confused when it came to describing the caste backgrounds of the 'native' soldiers. Lt Col. W.J. Wilson, the author of the *History of the Madras Army*, observed that these men were

> Brahmins or of some good castes and had to be remunerated in the following manner. A piece of land yielding 24 star pagodas or thereabout per annum was to be made over to each corps. Each man while employed was to receive two pagodas a month as pay, besides batta at the rate of two single fanams a day.[30]

Even before Wilson, Major General A. Macleod, who had written the book *India*, had stated that the 'native' infantry of Madras was generally composed of Muslims and Hindus of good caste and initially none but men of high military tribes were enlisted in the Company's army. He observed,

> in the progress of time, a considerable change took place and natives of all descriptions were enrolled in the service. Though some corps that were almost entirely from the lowest and the most despised races obtained considerable reputation, it was fear that their encouragement might produce disgust and particularly when they gained as they frequently did … orders were given to recruit from none but the most respectable classes of the society; and many considered the regular and orderly behaviour of these men as one of the benefits which have resulted from this system.[31]

James Hoover, in a recent monograph entitled *Men without Hats: Dialogue, Discipline and Discontent in the Madras Army, 1806–1807*, has dealt with the caste questions in the context of the new turban that was introduced for the Madrassi sepoys by the British. He points out that men of the 'native' infantry described this new turban as a threat to their caste identities. They felt that acceptance of this new turban would result in social ostracism and their own family members would forsake them. Nonetheless, there was considerable discussion on the new turban among the sepoys, and a section of them who refused to don them believed that it was nothing but a *topi* (the Indian version of a hat). No matter what a group of people chose to call it, there was an apprehension that wearing it would have grave social and personal consequences. This was based on the fear that identities would be blurred and the reputation of the families would be compromised. Equally serious was the anxiety that wearing the *topi* would sever their links with their families. The attitude of the sepoys became increasingly negative after their protest at Vellore. The upper-caste soldiers viewed the turban 'not as an accidental source of

ritual pollution, but as a deliberate scheme to defile sepoys as a class, for even Paraiyan sepoys were upset by this new turban'.[32] What remained as an all pervasive thought was the characterization of the turban as a hat. The sepoys believed that this outcaste-ing (or excommunication in terms of caste) would be followed by conversion to Christianity.

It has been argued that the turban that had been introduced for 'native' sepoys in early nineteenth-century south India could hardly be categorized as a new addition to the sepoys' attire. In most cases, the sepoys tried to give a shape to it by utilizing the wire frames and broadcloth of their old urban. They altered the shape of the frame and added the decorations stipulated by the general order accompanying the depot samples. Among the decorations was a leather cockade. In Vellore, the cockades were produced by 'untouchable' *chakkilyan* craftsmen who worked for one of the Anglo-Indian military contractors attached to the garrison. Ironically, it was not the leather cockades that caught the attention of the sepoys at Vellore, but rather the new shape of the turban. However, the majority of the men who joined the new mutineers hardly had much inclination to review these developments. In short, what the turban episode initially reflected was the growing differences between the upper-caste soldiery and the Paraiyan subalterns in the military. While this might be one side of the story, the other aspect of the story continues to be neglected. In the late eighteenth century, owing to fluctuations in the price of rice, the military establishment faced considerable difficulties in obtaining good recruits, and the battalions had to be maintained by accepting 'undersized men' and those belonging to the 'lower castes'. The British military commanders were successful in welding them into an army which the East India Company utilized to establish itself as a major trading group with political interests in the Indian subcontinent.[33]

The Dalit narrative of the Rebellion of 1857

Dalit activists in Tamilnadu have tried to recapture in their writings the stories of the sacrifices of the Paraiyan (the numerically largest caste who were categorized as 'polluting' and 'untouchable' categories by the colonial administration and were later designated as an important component of the Adi Dravida category, comprising two other caste groups, the Pallas and the Chakkiliyars) soldiers employed in the Company's army. In fact, they also point to the shrinking employment opportunities for the Paraiyans in the army following the Rebellion of 1857. T.P. Kamalanathan, in a monograph entitled *K. Veeramani is Refuted and the Historical Facts about the Scheduled Caste Struggle for Emancipation in India*, explicitly states that, since the 1760s and 1770s, the Paraiyans had constituted the bulk of the foot soldiers in the Company's army. In the following decades, they continued to find employment in the military departments. The military depots functioning in Madras and Trichinopoly served as the major recruiting centres for the Paraiyans interested in joining the army.[34]

In south India, the Company's military officials had frequently praised the Paraiyan soldiers for their submissive nature and dutiful conduct. Some of them had opined that opportunities to serve in the army had inculcated in these recruits a degree of self-respect and independence. *The Calcutta Review* of 1859 pointed out that serving the Company's army was very much a satisfying experience for the Paraiyans, as it provided them with the opportunity to experience the civic equality enjoyed by the other subjects of the Company.[35] V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, in their book entitled *Towards a non-Brahmin Millennium*: *From Iyothee Thoss to Periyar*, also project the opinion that the performance of military rituals and drills instilled among the Paraiyans the idea of belonging to a martial race. There was a belief that the prestige associated with a military uniform would ultimately pave the way for elimination of all forms of caste discrimination, and the 'untouchables' would no longer be kept tied to the bonds of exploitation and servitude.[36]

In such narratives, the Paraiyans are projected as a group, which until the middle of the nineteenth century had been the most numerous in the British Indian Army's regiments, such as the Queen's Own Sappers and Miners. The majority of the Dalit activists agree that, after the Rebellion of 1857, there was a virtual shift in the British government's military recruitment policy.[37] The British commanders, influenced by the 'martial race' theory, favoured the recruitment of upper-caste groups in the army. There seems to be a growing opinion that, while recruiting soldiers from various indigenous communities, a military, social and environmental perspective had to be taken into consideration, and this possibly explains the induction of the Jats, Gurkhas, Sikhs and Pathans in the military battalions.[38] In the case of the Madras battalions, the recruitment figures of the Paraiyans declined, and there was larger recruitment from the upper-caste Hindus, Christians and Muslims.[39] However, the Paraiyans did enjoy a presence in some of the branches of the military department. As late as the 1890s, the Paraiyans enjoyed a virtual monopoly as sappers and miners. The upper-caste apathy for menial occupations was partly responsible for this impressive presence of the Paraiyans in certain branches of the army.[40]

But the impact of 1857, as the Dalit writers have argued, was felt towards the end of the nineteenth century. The abolition of the old presidency armies as well as the increased recruitment of north Indian 'martial races' denied the Paraiyans the opportunity of future recruitment in the army. The south Indian *Tomtom*, as the Madrassi sepoy was affectionately referred to by the Company's military officials in the late eighteenth century, passed into oblivion. Such a situation did lead to a great deal of resentment among the emerging Adi Dravida leadership, which argued that military employment could serve as an effective channel of economic and social mobility of caste groups such as the Paraiyans, who had for long been considered as a polluting caste. In their memoranda and petitions sent to the British government, leaders such as Pandit C. Iyothee Thoss specified the importance that Paraiyans and the other Adi Dravida groups had always attached to military service. In a

memorandum sent to the government in 1894, Thoss referred to the valour and selfless sacrifice that had been displayed by the Paraiyan soldiers as members of the Company's battalions.[41] Such assertions in the long run became an integral part of the narrative on the Paraiyan history of south India, which was later subsumed within the grand agenda of Adi Dravida politics.

In fact, both the official and the Adi Dravida version of the British military recruitment policy brought back memories of events prior to the 1857 Rebellion and those after it. These memories often brought back an understanding of the past that was not mired in tales of 'self-degradation' and 'effeteness'. In fact, these acts of extolling the hidden past could be seen as a process of retrieval and amalgamation, whereby the past and the present often co-existed, blurring the distinctions of antiquity and contemporaneity. In the late nineteenth century, the Paraiyan community leaders had displayed a reluctance to accept official statements about the achievements of the upper-caste and Muslim soldiers. They repeatedly asserted that the establishment of British rule in the subcontinent would never have been possible without the participation of their members in the Company's army. In their writings on the Rebellion of 1857, the Paraiyan community leaders were obviously influenced by the shrinking employment opportunities for their community members following the enforcement of the 'martial race' theory.[42]

Conclusion

However, the question remains as to why Dalit activists in Tamilnadu are turning to this event in contemporary times. From the late 1980s, Tamilnadu has been a witness to caste violence involving upper- and middle-caste peasant groups on one side and the Adi Dravida communities on the other, leading to a loss of innocent lives. In most cases, this violence was related to land issues, but there have also been occasions when attempts on the part of the radical Dalit activists to appropriate upper-caste symbols influenced the dominant caste groups to reinforce the age-old traditions of subordination.[43] The intensity of such incidents has also been felt in academic circles. Indeed, questions were raised regarding the claims of the Indian nation-state to be a true representative of all classes in Indian society. The emphasis seemed to be more on the understanding of different histories.[44]

In recent times, there have been attempts on the part of scholars as well as Dalit activists to explore the multidimensional nature of the Rebellion of 1857. In his writings, Badri Narayan has emphasized the importance of Dalit memory and the transformation in the worldview of the Dalit participants following the Rebellion of 1857. This Dalit memory has produced narratives of 1857 that 'have not only tried to establish their own heroes, but also tried to dethrone the existing high caste heroes from the mainstream narrative'. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has rightly pointed out that historical accuracy is not the point to be noted in such assertions, but rather the importance of

recasting history in terms of a Dalit paradigm that needs to be comprehended by the readership.

In Tamilnadu, as M.S.S. Pandian has pointed out, the Dalit intellectuals, by critiquing and rejecting the civilizational claims of modernity, tried to claim a space for their politics. Raj Gowthamam, one of the leading Tamil intellectuals and a Dalit literary critic, in his writings rejected the civilizational claims and the teleology of modernity, and instead tried to recover the past of lowly hill cultivators, hunters, fisher-people, pastoralists and the like in a quest to place them at the highest levels of human achievement. This entire process of reclaiming the past, which for long had been mired in stigma, was deemed to be something essential in order to restore a sense of self-pride among the Dalits. Perhaps it is in this context that some of the Dalit activists and intellectuals[45] have taken up the role of historians and have tried to bring out the intricacies of the new *Panchama* (the word *Panchama* had a pejorative connotation and essentially meant the 'low castes', who were considered to be outside Hindu society) or Dalit histories. It is in their quest to use such histories as defining moments of Adi Dravida identity that the Rebellion of 1857 has gained a new position of importance.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

1 To the majority of the colonial writers, 'benighted Madras' had been a model presidency. Even Sen (1957) accepted this position. Historians such as N. Rajendran have argued that this was a rather oversimplistic statement, not borne out by facts, and that Sen had probably failed to consult the records available in the Tamilnadu archives at Chennai. It needs perhaps to be noted that the total number of men tried through courts martial in the Bengal army, the Bombay army and the Madras army during the 1857–58 'disturbances' were, 1,954, 1,213 and 1,044 respectively. For details, see Rajendran (2007a: 193).

2 N. Rajendran has argued that the pro-British memorial published on behalf of the 'educated community' in the government gazettes cannot be considered as representative of the views of the entire community. He refers to the Judicial Proceedings, September 1857, Tamil Nadu Archives (henceforth TNA). For more details, see Rajendran (2007a: 193–94).

3 In Tamilnadu, as in other parts of India, the earliest forms of anti-British protest took the form of localized rebellions and uprisings. The most prominent of these was the revolt of the *palayakkarargal* (Poligars) against the East India Company in 1799. The issue of taxation – whether the traditional rulers or the new group of collectors from overseas were to collect it – lay at the root of the Poligars' uprising. For details, see Rajendran (2007a: 181).

4 For details, see Hoover (2007: 56–60).

5 Hoover (2007: 61).

6 John William Kaye, *Life and Correspondence of Major General Sir John Malcolm*, 95–96, cited in Hoover (2007: 62).

7 For details, see Mill (1844: 123–44).
8 See John William Kaye, *A History of the Great Revolt* (3 vols), reprinted, New Delhi: Gian Publishers, 1996: Vol. I, 180–85 (first published in 1864, it was later published as Col. G.B. Malleson, ed. *Kaye's and Malleson's History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857–8*, London: W.H. Allen, 1889–93).
9 For details, see Guha (1997: 486–87); see also Hoover (2007: 63); Mason (1974: 236–37); Guha (1983: 267–68).
10 Frykenberg (1986: 207–31).
11 There were two major campaigns undertaken by the British against the Poligars in the late eighteenth century. In January 1775, the sepoys of the native infantry of the Ninth Battalion, who were then stationed at Tiruchirapalli, refused to march on the orders of the European officers. The council of war concluded that Makhdum Sahib, acting commandant of the Ninth Battalion of sepoys, was responsible for spreading sedition among the sepoys and pronounced the death sentence on him. In a space of two decades, the native sepoys of the 35th Battalion mutinied and were punished in the same manner. For details, see Rajayyan (1971); Chinnian (1982, 1983).
12 Susan Bayly seems to have based her narrative on the writings of Rajayyan and Chinnian, rather than relying on primary sources such as the Vellore Mutiny Papers. For details, see Bayly (1989: 224–26).
13 Wickremesekera (2002: 164).
14 Rajendran (2007a: 193).
15 The Triplicane area had a large Muslim population that had been dependent for a fairly long time on the fortunes of the Nawab of the Carnatic. The extinction of the Nawabship had led to a great deal of unemployment and economic depression, which fuelled popular distrust towards British rule. Proclamations and seditious letters that were seized made pleas to the Nizam and his ministers to join the war against the British. These letters also expressed the opinion that the downfall of British power was imminent and that it would be overthrown during the Mohurrum festival, which was to be celebrated shortly. For details, see Rajendran (2007a: 195).
16 Syed Kussa Mahomed Augurzah Hussain was believed to have held talks with the *zamindars* of Punganur (Chittoor district) and Vellore. For details, see Rajendran (2007a: 200).
17 The 18th Native Infantry of the British army was stationed at Vellore. Some of the sepoys of the regiment revolted in November 1858. It led to the killing of Captain Hart and Jailor Stafford. See Rajendran (2007a: 200).
18 In Bhavani, an industrial town situated close to Coimbatore, Mulbagulu Swamy stated in the course of his daily puja, 'Let all the (Demon-like) Europeans be destroyed; let the present British raj come to an end … let the rule of Nanasahib Peshwa prevail'. See Judicial Consultations of the government of Fort St George, no. 11, dated 15 September 1857, TNA.
19 On 8 August 1857, the magistrate of Chingleput, stationed in Saidapet, informed the government of Madras about the serious nature of the insurgency. Finally, Sultan Baksh and four of his followers were apprehended by the British army. For details, see Rajendran (2007a: 5).
20 Todd (1859), cited in P. Ananthakrishnan, 'No Dravida, only Banga, 1857 The Year that Shook India'. For more details, see http://theyear1857.wordpress.com/2007/05/06/no-dravida-only-banga (accessed 9 July 2007).
21 Todd (1859), cited in Ananthakrishnan, 'No Dravida, only Banga'.
22 Ananthakrishnan, 'No Dravida, only Banga'.
23 For details, see Mead (1857: 25–26).
24 Washbrook (1990: 481).
25 For more details, see Mead (1857: 21–22, 24–25); On Tamil Militarism – an 11-part essay, Part 2: Tamil Military Castes, *Lanka Guardian* (prepared by Sachi Sri Kantha

for electronic record), 15 May 1992, http://www.tamilnation.org/forum/sivaram/920515lg.htm; Adams (1943); Peers (1991: 545–46).

26 For details, see Mouat (1938).

27 The 37th Madras Infantry acquired the status of a Grenadier Battalion for its distinguished conduct; for details, see Mouat (1938: 6); see also On Tamil Militarism, Part 2.

28 For details, see Dodwell (1922: 14–15, 45–47).

29 The caste returns of the Madras army were prepared annually from 1859. The regimental registers contained the details of each man's enlistment, caste, region of origin and services that they were expected to perform in the regiments. But these were unfortunately incomplete, and only the registers of sixteen battalions have survived. The registers simply point out that Tamils on the whole lagged behind the Telingas. The Rajput, Marathas and Brahmins constituted a small segment, and the presence of the Christians and Pariahs was negligible. See Dodwell (1922: 45–47).

30 Wilson (1882: 179).

31 MacLeod (1872: 30).

32 See Hoover (2007: 57, 78).

33 In 1752, the East India Company established its first military department in Madras. The real reason behind this decision was to ensure the raising of a low cost but handy army. By this time, the major regional powers, which possessed modern and larger forces, fell into difficulties because of their inability to maintain the expensive high-caste soldiery. The failure on the part of these powers to meet the pecuniary demands of this soldiery let to frequent instances of mutiny. On the other hand, the English possessed an extremely loyal army that did not rebel over pay. The recruitment handbook of the Madras classes observed, 'never were these qualities more fully tried than in the war with Hyder. The pay of the army was sixteen months in arrears, famine raged all over the country, the enemy was at the gates offering large bounty and pay to our Sepoys to desert, but in vain. Under all these circumstances severe actions were fought. Their conduct during the war excited the admiration of all who knew it, and Frederick the Great of Prussia was known to have said, after reading Orme's account of the war, that had he the command of troops who acted like the sepoys on that occasion, he could conquer all Europe'; for details, see Mouat (1938: 9).

34 Kamalanathan (1985: 35).

35 *Calcutta Review*, 33, 1859: 143.

36 Geetha and Rajadurai (1998: 72).

37 The Madras Census Report of 1891 had stated that the Maravas were 'a fierce and turbulent race famous for their military prowess' and were to be 'chiefly found in Madura and Tinnevelly where they occupy the tracts bordering the coast from Cape Comorin to the northern limits of Ramnad Zemindari'. In fact, the British had tried to demilitarize them by depriving them of the status that they had enjoyed in traditional society. They were not only disfranchised but were also classified as a turbulent group, who needed to be the subject of a disciplinary and penal discourse, which later came in the form of criminal tribes legislations. However, the process of pacification of the Tamil region and the subsequent martialization of the north obliterated the legacy of Tamils from the military ethnography of South Asia. Nonetheless, the situation proved to be favourable for the recruitment of the non-military Tamil castes, the most important of whom were the Vellalas, Nadars and Adi Dravidas. For more details, see On Tamil Militarism – an 11-part essay, Part 2; Thurston and Rangachari (1909: 22–23); Kamalanathan (1985: 34).

38 For details, see Cohen (1969: 456).

39 Box. 10, Series II, Madras Army Records, January 1872, TNA.

40 Kamalanathan (1985: 34).
41 Pandit C. Iyothee Thoss, Open Letter to the Hon. Srinivasa Raghavaiyangar (Inspector General of Registration), Madras, 1894: 4 (preserved in the Theosophical Society Library, Adyar).
42 For details, see Raj Sekhar Basu, 'Socio-Cultural Transformation of Two Depressed Castes: The Case Studies of the Pulayas and Paraiyans of Southern India, 1850–1956', PhD Thesis, University of Calcutta, 2004, unpublished: 216.
43 Moses (1995); 'The New Resistance and the Politics of Caste', *Frontline*, 12 (24), November 18–December 1, 1995; Human Rights Watch (1999: 82–83).
44 For details, see Badri Narayan, 'Dalits and Memories of 1857', in Bhattacharya (2007: 150); Bhattacharya (2007: Introduction, xxx).
45 For details, see M.S.S. Pandian, *One Step Outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere*, Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, SEPHIS–CODESRIA, Lecture No. 4, Amsterdam/Dakar, 2001, 19–20.

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